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DISCOURSES

(IN THE FORM OF SKELETONS)

UPON

The Whole Scriptures.

BY

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110970

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DCCXCVII.

BENEFIT OF RECEIVING CHRIST.

John i. 10—12. *He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not. He came unto his own, and his own received him not: but as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name.*

THE blessings which administer to our worldly interest or bodily comfort, are equally welcomed by persons of all ranks and conditions: but those which have relation only to our spiritual good, are despised by many, and desired by very few. The light of the sun is not less prized by one than by another: all are sensible of its benefits, and value it accordingly. But "the Sun of righteousness has arisen upon us," and the benighted world regards him not: "he shines in the darkness, and the darkness apprehends him not[a]." Some however there are, who rejoice in his advent: and as they only have learned to appreciate his worth, they only shall enjoy the full benefits he confers.

The words of the Evangelist will lead us to shew,

I. The contempt poured on Christ by the unbelieving world—

What was said of him in that day is equally true in this:

1. His own *creatures* "do not know him"—

[It was Christ who formed the universe: "the world was made by him; and without him was not any thing made that

[a] ver. 5.

that was made[b]." He has moreover "been in the world" from the very beginning, "upholding it by his power[c]," and ordering every thing in it by his superintending providence. Yet, before his incarnation, he was not known; neither yet now is he known, as the Creator and Governor of the world. His name indeed is known; but he is considered only as a great prophet. The generality of those who *doctrinally* maintain his proper Deity, never *practically* realize the thought, that "by him all things subsist[d]."]

2. His own *people* "do not receive him"—

[The Jews were called "Christ's *own*," because he had separated them from all other people, brought them out of Egypt, led them through the wilderness, and derived his human nature from the stock of Abraham, their father. Their very country was called "Emmanuel's land[e]." But we are *his* in a still more appropriate sense; because he has bought us with his blood, and we have been baptized into his name; and profess ourselves his followers. Yet we "do not really receive him," any more than the Jews themselves did. We do not receive him *in the character which he bears in the holy Scriptures*[f]——— We do not receive him *for the ends and purposes for which he came*[g]———

Alas! what contempt is this which we pour upon him! We can shudder at the indignities offered him by the Jews; but we ourselves are no less criminal than the people who crucified and slew him: they through ignorance apprehended and executed him as a malefactor: we, with our eyes open, cry, "Hail, Master," and betray him[h].]

But that we may not continue to treat him thus, let us consider;

II. The honour he confers on those who believe in him—

A "receiving of Christ," and a "believing in him," are represented in the text as of precisely the same import. It is superfluous therefore to add any thing more in explanation of the terms. The benefits accruing from faith are the objects which next demand

[b] ver. 3. with the text. [c] Heb. i. 3. [d] Col. i. 17.

[e] Isai. viii. 8.

[f] He is a Prophet to teach us, a Priest to atone for us, a King to rule over us and in us. Do we receive him under these characters?

[g] He came to justify us by his blood, to sanctify us by his grace, and to save us with an everlasting salvation. Do we receive him for these ends?

[h] Matt. xxvi. 49.

demand our attention. Unspeakable is the honour of becoming a Child of God: yet to every one that believes in him, our blessed Lord gives,

1. To bear this relation to God—

[" To the Jews belonged the adoption[j]," as far as related to the external privileges of it. But we, on believing, " are made partakers of the Divine nature[k]." We become the Children of God as well by regeneration as adoption: yea, faith is at once the means[l], and the evidence[m], of our sonship with God. There is no interval of time left for us to give proofs of our sincerity, before God will acknowledge us as his: but the instant we believe in Christ, we are " sons and daughters of the Lord almighty[n]."]

2. To enjoy the privileges of this relation—

[The children of a stranger are not noticed by us, while our own children are admitted freely into our presence, and are the objects of our tenderest solicitude, our unremitted attention. We feed them, we clothe them, we protect them, we provide every thing for them that is suited to our circumstances, and that will contribute to their welfare. In all these respects Believers find God a Father to them. They can go into his presence, " crying, Abba, Father[o];" and obtain from him whatever is necessary either for their support or comfort.]

3. To possess an inheritance worthy of that relation—

[Parents account it a duty to provide for the future maintenance of their children, and not merely for their present subsistence. With this view they lay up fortunes for them, which they are to inherit after the decease of their parents. Similar to this is the provision made for those who believe in Christ. They are " begotten again to an inheritance that is incorruptible, and undefiled, and never-fading[p]." " Being sons, they are heirs, heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ[q]." Nor shall they merely divide their Father's inheritance among them; but every one of them shall enjoy the whole, and have his happiness enlarged, rather than diminished, by the communication of it to others.]

LEARN then from hence,

1. The folly of Unbelievers—

[One would suppose, that, in calling them to believe in Jesus

[j] Rom. ix. 4. [k] 2 Pet. i. 4. [l] Gal. iii. 26.
[m] 1 John v. 1. [n] 2 Cor. vi. 18. [o] Gal. iv. 6.
[p] 1 Pet. i. 3. [q] Rom. viii. 17.

Jesus Christ, we urged them to make the greatest sacrifices, and to resign every thing that could conduce to their happiness. But, on the contrary, we only invite them to "*receive;*" to receive "the greatest gift" which God himself is able to bestow[r]: to receive Him, in whom they will find all that they can possibly desire. We require them to surrender nothing but what will make them miserable; and to receive nothing which will not make them happy. How unreasonable does their conduct appear when viewed in this light! If we were to offer them bags of gold, we should find them willing enough to accept as many as we could bestow. But when we exhort them to accept *Him* who is of more value than ten thousand worlds, they turn a deaf ear to our most importunate intreaties. See, ye Unbelievers, see your extreme folly! and remember, that the day is coming, when that rejection of Christ, in which you now glory, will become the ground of your bitterest lamentation.]

2. The unspeakable benefit of faith—

[There are many things which put a considerable difference between one man and another. The influence of wealth and dignity exalts some far above the level of their fellow-creatures. The acquisition of knowledge and wisdom has no less effect in elevating the characters and conditions of men. But all the distinctions in the universe do not avail to dignify a man so much as faith. Faith brings Christ into the soul, and puts the poorest of men into the possession of "unsearchable riches." Faith makes him, from a child of the devil, a child of God; from an heir of misery, an heir of glory. Faith elevates him from death to life, from infamy to honour, from hell to heaven. "Faith, even though it be small as a grain of mustard-seed," produces all these wonderful effects. Cultivate then, my Brethren, this divine principle. Labour to have it in more continued exercise. Let Christ, the greatest object of faith, be more and more precious to your soul. Thus shall you be really the most distinguished characters on earth, and ere long "inherit the kingdom prepared for you by your heavenly Father."]

[r] John iv. 10.

DCCXCVIII.

INCARNATION AND CHARACTER OF CHRIST.

John i. 14. *And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.*

In

IN treating on Divine subjects, the mind should be impressed with holy awe: whenever we approach them, we should apply to ourselves the injunction given to Moses, and "pull off our shoes, as standing upon holy ground." But of all subjects, that of the incarnation of our blessed Lord should be contemplated with the profoundest reverence. It has heights and depths, which even the heavenly Intelligences themselves are unable to explore. "They are ever looking into it;" but to all eternity will behold in it fresh wonders to admire. But "great as is this mystery of Godliness, God manifest in the flesh," it cannot for one moment be questioned by any one who believes the Scriptures. The Evangelists, as inspired by the Holy Ghost, declare it; whilst, as "eye-witnesses of his Majesty," they attest it. Let us then with all humility of mind proceed to the consideration of the Apostle's testimony in our text; wherein we notice both the incarnation and the character of Christ.

I. The incarnation of Christ—

[The person here said to be made flesh, is "the Word:" and it is manifest, that *the Apostle speaks, as knowing that the persons to whom he spoke were familiar with the terms he used.* It does not appear probable that the Jews should borrow the term Logos (here translated "the Word," and elsewhere translated "Wisdom,") from the Platonists; or that the Apostle would adopt it from them. We rather suppose that the Jews, and consequently the Apostle also, received the term from the Scriptures themselves: for the Psalmist says, "By the Word of the Lord were the heavens made:" and Solomon, in the Book of Proverbs, speaks of "Wisdom" in almost the same terms as the Apostle uses in reference to "the Word[a]." At all events, we know from the whole preceding context, as also from the text itself, that the *Logos* or "the Word" is no other than "the only-begotten Son of God." We know that he subsisted from all eternity; that he was personally distinct from God the Father; that, nevertheless, he was truly and properly God; and, finally that, so far from being himself a creature, he was the Creator of all things, without any limitation or exception[b].

This divine person (the Second Person in the ever-adorable

[a] Prov. viii. 22—30.

[b] ver. 1—3. This is confirmed by Phil. ii. 6, 7. Col. i. 16, 17.

adorable Trinity,) "was made flesh;" that is, he assumed our nature with all its sinless infirmities; and "was made in all things like unto us, sin only excepted"———In that state of humiliation he sojourned upon earth, as once he dwelt with his people in the wilderness; his Deity being veiled by human flesh, as formerly it had been by the Shechinah, the bright cloud, which, as the symbol of his presence, dwelt in the Tabernacle first, and afterwards in the Temple.

We stop not to enlarge upon this stupendous mystery; wishing rather to shorten our discussion, that we may have the more room for a practical improvement of it.]

The Apostle, as we might well expect, after mentioning the incarnation of Christ, proceeds to notice,

II. His character—

[In the primary sense of the passage, the terms "full of grace and truth" refer to the *official* character of Christ. He came to introduce a dispensation very different from that which had hitherto existed. The law which Moses had given to the Israelites "was a ministration of death and condemnation:" and though the ceremonial law had held forth hopes of pardon and acceptance, yet it consisted merely in ritual observances, which in themselves were of no value, and which could never take away sin. But Jesus Christ came to proclaim pardon and peace to all; and was himself the substance, of which all the rites of Moses were only types and shadows. View the types of every description; and there was not one which had not its accomplishment in him: view the prophecies; all of which were fulfilled in him: and at the same time all the curses denounced by the moral law are turned into blessings, to all them who embrace his Gospel. Hence he is justly said to be "*full* of grace and truth."

But we may not improperly include under these words the *personal* character of Christ. Whilst all his instructions exactly accorded with the mind and will of God, his life was wholly without spot or blemish: he was "full of truth;" and "in him was no sin," "no guile" whatever.

As to the "grace" that was in him, listen only to any of his discourses; hear his gracious invitations even to the chief of sinners; see him conversing with publicans and harlots, and allowing them to have the freest access to him; behold him "going about doing good," healing all who came to him, even hundreds and thousands in a day, and proclaiming to all of them the glad tidings of a free and full salvation; and then say whether he was not also *full* of grace, even like an overflowing fountain, "out of whose fulness all that believed on him might receive?"

If we needed any express testimony respecting his character, we

we have it from those "whose ears heard, whose eyes saw, and whose hands handled this Word of life:" "they beheld his glory, as the glory of the only-begotten of the Father:" they beheld it in his miracles, ("by which he manifested forth his glory;") they beheld it in his transfiguration; in the audible attestations which he repeatedly received from heaven; in the perfections of wisdom, power, holiness, &c. which he displayed; and finally in his resurrection, and glorious ascension to the right hand of God: they beheld him in all these things, shining as "the brightness of his Father's glory, and the express image of his person:" veiled as his Godhead was from common eyes, *they* beheld in him a radiance, altogether suited to his august character.]

That we may not entertain these thoughts in a merely speculative manner, we would intreat you to "suffer a word of EXHORTATION"—

1. Inquire *wherefore* Christ became incarnate—

[When we hear of such an astonishing event, methinks we should naturally inquire into the reasons of it. Surely there was some *occasion* for it; nay, we cannot conceive that it should take place without some urgent necessity. What then was that necessity? It was *this*. The whole human race were become guilty before God, and were no more able to restore themselves to the Divine favour than the fallen angels were. Is any one disposed to doubt this truth? let him tell us then, *why* God's co-equal, co-eternal Son became incarnate. In vain will he seek for a reason, except (where St. Paul found it,) in the lost state of man: "If one died for all, then were all dead"———Know ye then, Beloved, every one of you, that you are, in yourselves, lost and hell-deserving sinners; and that, if ever you be saved at all, it must be by the blood and righteousness of your incarnate God. ———]

2. Endeavour to obtain clearer views of his character—

[Though there are days expressly set apart for the consideration of the most important things relating to Christ, his formation in the womb, his nativity, his circumcision, his death, his resurrection, and ascension, yet few, very few are in the habit of directing their attention to him. Instead of "counting all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of him," they scarcely think of him at all, or desire to receive any instruction respecting him. Hence that supineness which we behold on every side———But how different would be the state of men, if they once saw his glory, and had just views of his "grace and truth!" What "a gathering of the people to him" would there then be! How would they "flock

to

to him as the doves to their windows!"———O that God would take the veil from our hearts——— And that we might so "behold his glory, as to be changed by it into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of our God!"]

3. Seek after a closer union with him—

[We may all be said to be united with him in some respect, because "we are partakers of flesh and blood, and he likewise has taken part of the same." But it is not his union with our nature that will save us, but our union with him; not his being one *flesh* with us, but our being "one *spirit* with him." We must exercise faith on him; and by means of that faith be united to him as branches to the vine, or as members to the head———Without this, we can never hope to receive out of his fulness those blessings which we stand in need of———Let none of you then imagine that you have any interest in his salvation, till you are brought daily to live a life of faith upon him, and, through the influences of his Spirit, to devote yourselves unreservedly to his service.]

4. Aspire after that which was the great end of his coming—

[We are constantly reminded that he came into the world, that they who believe in him might become sons of God, and enjoy everlasting life[c]———Shall we then be indifferent about that which brought him down from heaven? How shall we bear the sight of him in the day of judgment, when we shall behold him in the very same body which he assumed on earth? How will that stupendous effort of his love reproach and confound us! How shall we even wish that we had been permitted to perish like the fallen angels, instead of being left to contract that more aggravated guilt of sinning against a God in our own nature, and rejecting the salvation which he died to purchase for us! If we could suppose the Saviour now capable of weeping, as once he did over the impenitent Jerusalem, methinks he must be now weeping over many of us, to see how his love has been disregarded by us, and that the only effect of it is to aggravate our condemnation. Let us awake from this fatal stupor; let us follow him in our hearts to those realms of glory where he now dwells; and strive incessantly for the attainment of that kingdom, where we shall be with him and like him for ever.]

[c] Gal. iv. 4, 5.

DCCXCIX.

THE BELIEVER'S INTEREST IN CHRIST'S FULNESS.

John i. 16. *Of his fulness have all we received, and grace for grace.*

THE Sacred Writers never seem to be afraid lest they should exalt Christ too much, or ascribe to him a glory which did not properly belong to him. St. John in particular evinces a desire to magnify him as much as possible, and sets forth his perfect equality in as strong and perspicuous terms as language would afford. In the chapter before us he declares that Christ was not only co-existent with God before the world, but that he himself was God, the sole Creator of the universe; and in the words we have just read, he represents him as the only source of all good[a].

That we also may be led to glorify his name, we shall shew,

I. What is that fulness spoken of in the text—

Jesus Christ has in himself all the fulness of the Godhead[b]. But this cannot be the fulness of which the Apostle speaks, because the Godhead is absolutely incommunicable to the creature. There is another fulness, which, according to the Father's appointment, dwells in him as our Mediator[c], namely, a fulness of every thing which his redeemed people can stand in need of—

[Are we immersed in darkness, and sitting in the shadow of death? He is "the light of the world; and whosoever followeth him shall not abide in darkness, but shall have the light of life[d]." Are we inexpressibly guilty, and incapable of working out a righteousness for ourselves? He is "Jehovah our Righteousness[e]," and "the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth[f]."—Are we so depraved as to be "altogether filthy and abominable," and "insufficient of ourselves even to think a good thought?" He has within himself a fountain of grace to "cleanse us from our filthiness," and to purify us unto himself a peculiar people, zealous

[a] If ver. 15 be considered as in a parenthesis, the connection between ver. 14 and 16 will be clear and manifest.

[b] Col. ii. 9. [c] Col. i. 19. [d] John viii. 12.
[e] Jer. xxiii. 6. [f] Rom. x. 4.

zealous of good works[g]. Are we exposed to severe afflictions and manifold temptations? In him is boundless compassion to sympathize with us, and irresistible power to succour and support us[h]. Thus has he in himself a fulness of *light* to instruct, of *merit* to justify, of *grace* to renew, of *compassion* to pity, and of *power* to save us, even "to the very uttermost" of all our wants[i].]

This fulness, however, is not the same with that which resides in his believing people—

[There is a fulness with which Believers are filled, even "all the fulness of God[k]." But theirs is widely different from his. *Theirs* is *limited*, being only "according to the measure of the gift of Christ[l];" but *his* is *unbounded*; "the Father giveth not the Spirit by measure unto him;" "he has the residue of the Spirit," dwelling and abiding in him[m]. *Theirs* moreover is *derived* from him as its proper source and fountain; but *his* is *essentially inherent* in him: "in him was life" originally: "as the Father has life in himself, even so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself[n]." *Theirs* is *for themselves alone*; they have not any to communicate to others[o]: *His* is *for the* use and *benefit of his Church*: he possesses it, that, being Head over all, he may impart out of it, and "fill all things with it[p]." *Theirs* is *perishable*: though they be filled with it now, even as an house with light from the meridian sun, they would be destitute of it in an instant, if the communications of heaven were intercepted or withheld: but *his* is immutable and *eternal*: he is "the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever[q]."]

That our inquiries about this fulness are not merely speculative, will appear, while we shew,

II. What interest Believers have in it—

Every Believer receives out of the fulness that is in Christ—

[To state the precise mode in which Jesus communicates his blessings to the soul, is impossible; nor, while we remain strangers to so many things in nature, must we wonder, if there be some things in the dispensations of Grace which we cannot fully comprehend[r]. But the illustrations, with which the Scripture furnishes us, are sufficiently clear for any purposes of useful instruction. Christ is represented as a vine of

[g] Zech. xiii. 1. Tit. ii. 14.
[h] Heb. iv. 15. and ii. 18.
[i] Heb. vii. 25.
[k] Eph. iii. 19.
[l] Eph. iv. 7.
[m] John iii. 34. Mal. ii. 15.
[n] John i. 4. & v. 26.
[o] Matt. xxv. 9.
[p] Eph. i. 22, 23. & iv. 10.
[q] Heb. xiii. 8.
[r] John iii. 8.

of which we are the branches; and as an Head, to which we are united as the members. Now, as between these a vital union and constant communication are necessary, in order to the support of animal or vegetative life; so is it by constant, though invisible, supplies of grace from Christ that the Believer is enabled to maintain his spiritual life and vigour[s]—]

He receives from Christ "grace for grace"—

[The terms "grace for grace" are variously interpreted, nor is it easy to ascertain which of the different senses is the true one. Some explain it of "the *substantial* grace of the Gospel," which all, both Jews and Gentiles, receive; "instead of the *shadowy* grace that was contained in the legal dispensation:" others understand it as importing "grace upon grace," administered in copious and successive portions: others again think it means, "grace answerable to the grace that is in Christ Jesus;" and others, "grace for grace sake." Without determining which of these interpretations we should exclusively retain, we may observe, in reference to them all, that all those blessings which Believers under the Law enjoyed by means of types and ceremonies, we have conveyed to us in a fuller measure, and by the more simple channel of the written word: "Christ came that we might have life, and have it more abundantly[ss]." Nor is there any intermission to the communications which we receive from Christ; they flow, like the waves of the sea, in constant succession and the richest abundance: whatever we have received, it will always be found true, that "he giveth more grace[t]." His aim in bestowing on us such "abundance of grace, and of the gift of righteousness," is, that he may transform us into his own likeness. And this is the effect which he produces: as a parent begets a child in his own likeness, or a seal stamps its own image on the wax impressed by it, so does the Lord Jesus communicate to us the very graces that there are in him, till we are "changed into his image from glory to glory[u]." All this he does purely "of his own good pleasure," and for the honour of his Father's name. He sees not any thing in us which can merit such unspeakable favours; "he is gracious because he will be gracious; and has compassion because he will have compassion[x]." Nor must we forget that this is the privilege of "*all*:" the Apostles themselves could draw from no other fountain; and it is alike open to all who will go to it[y]."]

INFER,

1. How glorious is Christ in himself, and how suited to our necessities!

[We

[s] John xv. 5. Eph. iv. 15, 16.
[t] Jam. iv. 6.
[x] Rom. ix. 15, 16.
[ss] John x. 10.
[u] 2 Cor. iii. 18.
[y] John vii. 37.

[We admire the sun in the firmament because it pours out its blessings upon so many at once: but *that* can enlighten only half the globe at one time. Not so the glorious Person of whose fulness we speak? if every person in the whole creation should call upon him at the same moment, he would have no occasion to defer an answer to the request of any; he is all eye to see, all ear to hear, all hand to relieve; in the very same instant he could replenish all, out of his own inexhaustible, undiminished fulness. Who then can hesitate a moment to pronounce him "God over all, blessed for ever?" And is not this exactly such a Saviour as we need? Are not we all emptiness and poverty, all weakness and misery? Is that description exaggerated which represents us as "wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked[z]?" Let us adore our God for giving us *such* a Saviour; and let us "live continually by faith on the Son of God," making him our "wisdom, our righteousness, our sanctification, and our complete redemption."]

2. How highly privileged are all true Believers!

[The Believer may survey all the fulness that there is in Christ, and claim it all as his own. All which Christ possesses in himself, all which he can do on earth, and all which he can bestow in heaven, is the portion of every the weakest Saint, according to the measure of the grace that is in him, and according to the capacity which he has for receiving more grace. Every vessel of the sanctuary, from "the smallest cups to the largest flagons," shall be filled[a]: if any be straitened in the blessings they receive, they are "straitened in themselves, and not in him[b]." Blessed, thrice blessed are all that "hang upon him!" But can the text be applied to all this assembly? Can we say respecting you, without exception, "Out of his fulness have *we all* received?" Would to God we could! Would to God that the graces, which were in Christ, were so conspicuous in you all, and were poured out upon you in such an abundant measure, that there might be no room to doubt of your union with him! But let this matter be no longer in suspense; let us all go to the Fountain-head, and "draw water with joy out of the wells of salvation[c]:" let us "aspire after the blessedness of God's chosen, that we may rejoice for ever in the gladness of his nation, and glory with his inheritance[d]."]

[z] Rev. iii. 17. [a] Isai. xxii. 24. [b] 2 Cor. vi. 12.
[c] Isai. xii. 3. [d] Ps. cvi. 5.

DCCC.

THE RESURRECTION, A PROOF OF CHRIST'S MESSIAHSHIP.

John ii. 18, 19. *Then answered the Jews, and said unto him, What sign shewest thou unto us, seeing that thou doest these things? Jesus answered and said unto them, Destroy this Temple, and in three days I will raise it up.*

THE work of reformation usually involves in difficulties those who undertake it. They who are the objects of it, however justly reproved, are sure to take offence, and to condemn the zeal which censures them. No one can doubt but that the turning of God's House into a place of merchandize was a very shameful practice; or, that to suppress it was highly commendable: yet, when our blessed Lord exerted his authority to check this abuse, the people, instead of applauding his zeal, expressed great dissatisfaction, and demanded of him, what right he had to interfere in that matter. The very awe which was impressed on all their minds, whereby they were constrained to yield to the rebukes of a poor man unsupported by any human authority, might have convinced them, that a power more than human existed in the person of the Lord Jesus: and, if they had taken occasion to make inquiries respecting him in a becoming spirit, he would no doubt have given them all reasonable satisfaction: but, as their demands arose from mere petulance, he declined satisfying them by any fresh miracle, and referred them to an event yet distant, which, when accomplished, should be a perfect answer to every inquiry.

To place this matter in a just point of view, we shall shew,

I. To what event our Lord referred—

The occasion on which the words were spoken, will reflect considerable light on the words themselves. It was common with our Lord to make the things which were immediately before him subservient to his purpose of conveying spiritual instruction: and

and this he did on the present occasion. He had purged the Temple from the abuses to which it had been exposed. The act itself, all things considered, was miraculous. A miracle was required of him to prove his right to exercise such authority: but he, not choosing to gratify this unreasonable demand, told the Jews, that, as they had *defiled* the material Temple, so they would *destroy* the Temple of his body: and that, as he had *purged* the one, so he would in three days *rebuild* and restore the other: and that this latter miracle would abundantly vindicate his claim to the authority he used.

In this figurative prediction he intimated,

1. That his own body was typically represented by the Temple—

[Both were formed, the one by man, and the other by God himself, as a residence for the Deity[a]; and in both God vouchsafed to dwell: in the one symbolically, by a visible cloud; in the other really, personally, bodily, even in all his fulness[b]———]

2. That they would in due time destroy it—

[His words are not to be construed as a command or advice, but simply as a prediction. He knew what they would do: he knew "what his heavenly Father had determined before to be done:" he knew what he had undertaken both to do and suffer for us: and he frequently, from his very first entrance on his Ministry to the close of it, foretold the precise manner of his death, together with the various circumstances which should accompany it———]

3. That he, by his own power, would raise it up again in three days—

["He had power to lay down his life, and power to take it again:" and he declared that he would put forth this power to the confusion of all his enemies. He fixed the time of his resurrection, agreeably to the predictions of the Prophets concerning it; a time amply sufficient for ascertaining the reality of his death, though not sufficient for his body to contract any corruption. On the accomplishment of this prophecy he rested all his pretensions to the Messiahship; and by it he would prove, that "he was indeed the very Christ"———]

The accomplishment of this event need not at this time

[a] Heb. viii. 2. [b] Col. ii. 9.

time be insisted on: it is more to our purpose to shew,

II. How it proved his Divine authority—

We are told that Christ "was declared to be the Son of God with power by his resurrection from the dead." If it be asked, How did his resurrection prove his Messiahship? we answer,

1. No impostor would rest his pretensions on such an appeal as this—

[An impostor would rather confirm his authority by an appeal to something which he might accomplish in his lifetime, in order that his credit might be raised, and his hands be strengthened for the furtherance of his designs. At all events, he would not found his hopes of success on a matter so entirely out of the reach of all human power, where the failure might be so easily, so speedily, so demonstrably ascertained: to do this would be to counteract all his own wishes, and to expose himself and his adherents to utter contempt. Such conduct would be perfect madness: and therefore we cannot suppose that our blessed Lord, who on all occasions manifested such consummate wisdom, could have pursued it. Had he been an impostor, he would at least have selected some other test, more within the bounds of credibility, and less open to detection.]

2. Supposing such an appeal made in support of an imposture, God would never work a miracle to sanction and confirm it—

[That God has permitted wonderful things to be wrought by liars and impostors, is certain: but he has at the same time afforded means for discovering the imposture; or rather, he has permitted those very wonders for the purpose of manifesting his own superior power, and confirming thereby the faith of his people, whilst his enemies were hardened in their own wilful delusions[c]. But in raising up Jesus from the dead, he has not only given us no contrary testimony to counteract the impression, but has left us no room for doubt. This must have been done by himself alone: none but an almighty power could effect it. On this one point the whole weight of our Lord's pretensions rested. Our Lord was willing to be thought an impostor, if this miracle were not wrought in his favour. What shall we say then? If God knew him to be an impostor, he himself interposed to give weight and efficacy to his imposture: he interposed to deceive his own people, and

[c] Exod. vii. 11, 12—20, 22. & viii. 7, 8, 17, 18, 19. Acts viii. 9—11.

and to blind the eyes of those who were most desirous to serve him aright. But can this be true? Can we for a moment admit the thought? The inference then is clear and undeniable; that Jesus was indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world — — —]

But it is not in speculative truths that we should rest. We proceed therefore to inquire,

III. What practical instruction is to be gathered from it—

In this part of our subject, we shall limit our observations to the event as it stands connected with the occasion on which it was foretold. We have before seen that it was referred to in confirmation of the authority which our Lord had exerted. It shews us therefore,

1. That God is indignant with those who pollute his Temple—

[It is common to imagine, that the frequenting of the House of God at certain seasons must of necessity be a service pleasing and acceptable in the sight of God. But can our bodily presence there be pleasing to him, if our hearts be altogether occupied with the world? If our farms and our merchandize, our lusts and our pleasures, fill our minds, what will it profit us to bow our knees, or to repeat our forms of prayer? It is not *thus* that we are to worship God: "we are to worship him in spirit and in truth;" and our external services, while destitute of spiritual affections, are gross hypocrisy: and we, in presenting such services, are no better than those whom our Lord accused of turning his Father's House into a house of merchandize.

But it is not from the outward Temple only that evil should be expelled: our hearts are "the Temples of the Holy Ghost," and are therefore at the peril of our souls to be preserved pure: "If any man defile the Temple of God," says the Apostle, "him shall God destroy[d]." What reason have we all to tremble at this solemn declaration! Consider, Brethren, what grievous abominations have been harboured there! what a mass of filthiness, "filthiness both of flesh and spirit," has God seen in us! what pride, envy, malice, wrath! what worldliness! what sensuality! alas! alas! "It is indeed of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed, even because his compassions fail not." We may plead custom, and a variety of other excuses, just as they did who defiled the material Temple: but if

[d] 1 Cor. iii. 16, 17.

if our hearts be not now purged by the grace of God, it is in vain to hope that he will ever make them his residence in a future world. Let us then beg of him to drive out every hateful disposition: and, whatever scourge he may see fit to use for this purpose, let us never wish to be delivered from the pains it may inflict, till we have fully experienced its sanctified effects.]

2. That whatever pollutes his Temple shall yield to the almighty power of Christ—

[When we see the extreme depravity of our hearts, and compare it with the purity of God's holy law, we are ready to say, that it is impossible for us ever to become what God requires. But he who exerted such power over the minds of those who "made the Temple a den of thieves;" who could *literally* have destroyed the Temple and built it again in three days; and did actually raise to life again his own "crucified body;" He, I say, can easily effect the renovation of our hearts: with him all things are possible: whatever difficulties we may have to surmount, "his grace is sufficient for us"——— We need only look to his Apostles, "who were men of like passions with us," and we may see what he can do for us. "It was by the grace of God that they were what they were:" and God is still the same as in the days of old; "his arm is not shortened that it cannot save; nor is his ear heavy that it cannot hear"——— It is to carry on his work in our hearts that Jesus is risen: "I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto me." Let us then pray that we may know him in the power of his resurrection," and "be sanctified wholly;" and that "our whole spirit, soul, and body, may be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ[e]." "Faithful is He that hath called us, who also will do it[f]."]

[e] 1 Thess. v. 23. [f] ib. ver. 24.

DCCCI.

THE LOVE OF GOD IN GIVING HIS SON FOR MAN.

John iii. 16. *God so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.*

THE doctrine of our reconciliation with God through the death of his Son, is calculated to impress our minds with a deep sense of the love of

Christ in undertaking for us; but, if not cautiously stated, it may give us very erroneous conceptions respecting the Father. If, for instance, we imagine that the Father needed the mediation of his Son to render him propitious, then we must ascribe all the glory of our salvation to the Son, and consider the Father merely as acquiescing in the Son's wishes, and shewing mercy to us for his sake. But the whole plan of our salvation originated with the Father: the very gift of a Saviour was the fruit of the Father's love; and therefore, in contemplating the wonders of Redemption, we must trace them to their proper source, the love of God the Father.

To this view of things we are led by the text; in elucidating which, we shall not form any particular arrangement, but simply take the several expressions contained in it, and use them as so many mirrours to reflect light upon one central point, *the love of God the Father in sending his only-begotten Son to die for us.*

Consider then, first, *the Giver*—

[If man confer a benefit upon his fellow-creature, we are not surprised; because there is no man so elevated, but he may need the assistance of his inferiors; nor is there any man so depressed, but he may, at some period or other, have it in his power to requite a kindness. But "God" is totally independent of us; "our goodness extendeth not to him[a];" "it is no profit to him that we are righteous[b]:" he would have been equally happy and glorious, though no creature had ever been formed; and he would remain so, if every creature in the universe were annihilated. How wonderful, then, was it, that he should condescend to look on us; yea, that he should take such an interest in our affairs, as to supply, at a most incalculable price, our pressing necessities! Even in this first view of his love we are lost with wonder.]

But our admiration will be greatly increased, if we reflect upon *the gift*—

[It was his Son, "his only-begotten Son," whom he vouchsafed to give. It was not a creature; no, not the first of all created Beings, but his co-equal, co-eternal Son[c]; who from eternity had been in his bosom[d], and "daily his delight[e]."

A less

[a] Ps. xvi. 2. [b] Job xxii. 2, 3. [c] Mic. v. 2. [d] John i. 18.
[e] Prov. viii. 22—30.

A less gift than that would not have sufficed for our relief: and a greater, God himself was not able to bestow. In comparison of this, ten thousand angels would have been as nothing; yea, all the hosts of heaven would not have been more, than a grain of sand is in comparison of the universe. Yet God, seeing our wants, "sent his own Son to be a propitiation for our sins[f]." What manner of love was this! How "incomprehensible are its breadth and length, and depth and height[g]!"]

Additional lustre will be reflected on this mystery, if we consider *the manner in which he bestowed this gift*—

[He waited not to be solicited: indeed no creature could have asked for such a favour: the thought could not have entered into the mind of any created intelligence; nor, if it had occurred, could he have presumed to utter it. But God needed no suggestion from his creatures: his love prevented their requests[h]; it even provided for their wants before those wants existed, yea, before the creatures themselves had any being. He himself is love[i]; and the exercise of mercy is his delight[k]. He neither had, nor could have, any inducement from without: all his motives were found within his own bosom: the displaying of his own unbounded love was a sufficient reason for his utmost exertions: he shewed mercy for mercy sake; and "gave," because it was the joy of his soul to give.]

But how will this stupendous love be heightened in our esteem, if we take into consideration *the persons on whom this gift was bestowed!*

[It was not vouchsafed to angels, though angels needed it as much as we. This was a mercy reserved for fallen man, even for "the world" that lieth in wickedness[l]. To form an estimate of the world, let us look around us, and see to what an awful extent iniquity abounds: or, if we would have our judgment still more according to truth, let us look within our own hearts, and see what horrible abominations are harboured there. We know nothing of others, but by their words and actions: but we have a juster criterion within our own bosoms: we may search into our own thoughts and desires; we may discern the base mixture that there is in all our motives and principles of action: in short, we may see such "a world of iniquity" within us, as may well constrain us to say, with David,

[f] 1 John iv. 9, 10. [g] ib. with Eph. iii. 18, 19.

[h] God, instead of following our first parents with denunciations of wrath, gave, unsolicited, that promise, which was the foundation of hope to them and all their posterity. Gen. iii. 15.

[i] 1 John iv. 16. [k] Mic. vii. 18. [l] Heb. ii. 16.

David, "My heart sheweth me the wickedness of the ungodly, that there is no fear of God before his eyes[m];" yes, in our own hearts there is an epitome of all the evil that is in the world: and, if we know any thing of ourselves, we shall stand amazed that God should look upon such a world as this, and give his only dear Son to save those who so richly merited his hottest indignation.]

We cannot do justice to this subject, if we do not further notice *God's ultimate design in bestowing this precious gift upon us*—

[We must, but for this marvellous effort of divine love, have perished in our sins. Having resembled the fallen angels in their sin, we must have resembled them also in their misery. But "God would not that we should perish." Notwithstanding the greatness and universality of our guilt, he would not that we should suffer according to our desert; and therefore he interposed for our deliverance. But this was not all. He desired to restore us to our forfeited inheritance, and to bring us to the possession of "everlasting life." It was not enough for him to save us from perishing; he must also renovate us after his own image, and make us partakers of his own glory. What stupendous love was this! That he should ever think of receiving such hateful creatures into his presence; that he should lay a plan for the exalting of them to thrones and kingdoms in heaven; and that he should even give his only-begotten Son out of his bosom to effect it! How infinitely does this surpass all the comprehension of men or angels!]

The condition which he has imposed for our participation of these benefits, yet further illustrates and magnifies his love—

[Suppose God had said, "Find me fifty righteous, or forty, or thirty, or twenty, or only ten, and for their sakes I will pardon and save all the rest[n]:" we must have perished, because among the whole human race there is "not one righteous, no, not one[o]."

Suppose that, instead of this, he had said, "I will give my Son to die for your past offences, and will bring you back to a state of probation; whereby, if you fall not again from your righteousness, you shall be saved:" the offer had been exceeding kind and gracious; but we should not long have reaped any solid advantage from it: we should soon have broken the covenant again, and been involved in the same misery as before.

Suppose

[m] Ps. xxxvi. 1. Prayer-book translation. [n] Gen. xviii. 24—32.
[o] Rom. iii. 10.

Suppose God had said, "I foresee that a renewal of your former covenant would be to no purpose; and therefore my Son shall work out a righteousness for you; and I require nothing of you, but to add to that a righteousness of your own, that the two righteousnesses together may form a joint ground of your acceptance with me:" alas! we should have been in as deplorable a state as ever; for we never have done, nor ever can do, one single act, which, if weighed in the balance of the sanctuary, will not be found wanting.

But suppose God yet further to lower his demands, and to say, "I will give you a complete salvation through the blood and righteousness of my dear Son; and I will require nothing of you, but only to render yourselves worthy of it:" still had our state been altogether hopeless; for we can no more render ourselves worthy of such a mercy, than we can create a world.

This was well known to God; and therefore he proposed none of these things: he requires only that we should believe in his Son, and accept freely what he so freely offers. It is true, that, if even this depended on ourselves, we should perish; because without the grace of God we cannot exercise saving faith[p]: but still this is the condition, which alone is suited to our helpless state; because it implies a total renunciation of all merit or strength in ourselves, and leads us to Christ, that we may find our all in him. O how does this enhance the love of God! And in what bright colours does that love appear, when viewed in the light which so many mirrours reflect upon it!]

If any thing can add to the lustre with which his love already shines, it is the *extent in which the offers of these benefits are made*—

[There is not a human Being upon earth, who shall not be a partaker of all these benefits, if only he believe in Christ. There is no limitation, no exception: God gave his Son, that "whosoever" believeth in him should not perish. Past sins, however numerous or heinous, are no bar to our acceptance with God, if only we accept his mercy on the terms on which it is offered. This is the uniform testimony of Holy Writ[q]——— O let us magnify God for his mercy; and be telling of the wonders of his love from day to day!]

INFER,

1. How aggravated must be the condemnation of them that reject the Gospel!

[Our Lord says, "This is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, but men loved darkness rather than light,

[p] Phil. i. 29.
[q] Isai. xlv. 22. & lv. 1. & Rev. xxii. 17. & John vi. 37.

light, because their deeds were evil[r]." Let this sink down into our ears: for, if such love cannot melt us into contrition, and such goodness bring us to repentance, we may well expect a most accumulated weight of vengeance at the hands of an offended God.]

2. How groundless are the fears of many who embrace the truth!

[Many sincere Christians are troubled in mind; some on account of their temporal wants, and others on account of their spiritual necessities. But, "if God has delivered up his own Son for us, will he not with him also freely give us all things[s]?" And "if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, shall we be saved by his life[t]." These are unanswerable arguments; and they should compose our minds under trials, of whatever kind.]

3. How deeply should we all be affected by the love of God!

[Pungent indeed is that question, "What could I have done more for my vineyard, that I have not done[u]?" The more we consider HOW God has loved the world, the more we shall see that he has indeed done all for us that he could do, consistently with our free agency, and his own honour. And when he has so loved the world, are we at liberty to forget him? Does such love call for no return? or are we to requite it only by increased impiety? O let every one of us say, "What shall I render to the Lord?" And let his love to us constrain us to devote ourselves unreservedly to him.]

[r] John iii. 19. [s] Rom. viii. 32. [t] Rom. v. 10.
[u] Isai. v. 4.

DCCCII.

MEN'S HATRED OF THE LIGHT.

John iii. 19—21. *This is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For every one that doeth evil, hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved. But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God.*

IT appears strange to many, that the everlasting happiness or misery of the soul should be made to depend

depend on the exercise of faith. The declaration of our Lord, That "he that believeth shall be saved, and he that believeth not shall be damned," is regarded by them as "a hard saying:" they see no proportion between the work and the reward on the one hand, or between the offence and the punishment on the other. In the words before us we have a solution of the difficulty. We are taught that faith and unbelief are not mere operations of the mind, but exercises of the heart; the one proceeding from a love to what is good; the other from a radical attachment to evil. Our blessed Lord had repeatedly inculcated the necessity of believing in him, in order to a participation of his proffered benefits. He had also represented Unbelievers as "already condemned," even like criminals reserved for execution: To obviate any objection which might arise in the mind of Nicodemus in relation to the apparent severity of this sentence, he proceeded to shew the true ground of it, namely, That, in their rejection of him, men are actuated by an invincible love of sin, and by a consequent hatred of the light which is sent to turn them from sin.

In opening the words of our text, we shall shew,

I. What is that light which is come into the world—

Christ is cal'ed "The light of the world," "The true light," "The Day-star," and "The Sun of righteousness that arises with healing in his wings." But,

It is *the Gospel* which is here said to have "come into the world"—

[The glad tidings of salvation were now published by Christ himself; and both the manner in which that salvation was to be effected, and the manner in which it was to be received, were clearly revealed. Our blessed Lord had in this very discourse with Nicodemus declared, that "the Son of Man was to be lifted up upon the cross, as the serpent had been in the wilderness," in order that all who were dying of the wounds of sin might look to him and be healed. He had repeated again and again this important truth, on which the salvation of our fallen race depends. This mystery had from eternity been hid in the bosom of the Father; but now it was made fully manifest. *This* "light was now come into the world."]

The

The Gospel, in this view of it, is fitly designated under the metaphor of "light"—

[*Light is that, without which no one thing can be discerned aright.*—And how ignorant are we, till the light of the Gospel shines in our hearts! We know nothing of ourselves, of God, of Christ, or of the way to heaven. We cannot even appreciate the value of the soul, the importance of time, the emptiness of earthly vanities. We may indeed give our assent to the statements which we hear made upon these subjects; but we cannot have an experimental and abiding sense, even of the most obvious truths, till our minds are enlightened by the Gospel of Christ.

Light causes all other things to be seen in their true colours.—Thus does also the Gospel: in setting forth the Son of God as dying for our sins, it shews us the malignity of sin; the justice of God which required such an atonement for it; and, above all, the wonderful love of God, in giving us his only dear Son, in order that we might have peace through the blood of his cross.

Light carries its own evidence along with it:—Thus does also that glorious Gospel of which we are speaking: it is so peculiarly suited to the necessities of man, and at the same time so commensurate with his wants; it is so calculated to display and magnify all the perfections of the Deity, and is in every respect so worthy of its Divine Author; that it commends itself to us instantly as of heavenly origin, the very master-piece of Divine wisdom.

One would imagine that such light should be universally welcomed: but since this is not the case, we shall proceed to shew,

II. Whence it is that men reject it—

It is but too evident, that, as in former ages, so now also, men reject the light. But whence does this arise?

It is not because they have any sufficient reason to reject it—

[If there were any thing in the Gospel that rendered it unworthy of men's regard, they would have some excuse for rejecting it. But,

They cannot say that it is *inapplicable in its nature.*—We will appeal to the world, and ask, What is there, that guilty and helpless sinners would desire? Would they wish for a Saviour? Would they be glad that the whole work of salvation should be committed into his hands? Would they be especially desirous that nothing should be required of them, but

but to receive with gratitude, and improve with diligence, what the Saviour offers them? In short, Would they be glad of a free and full salvation? *This* is precisely such a salvation as is provided for them in the Gospel.

They cannot say that it is *inadequate in its provisions.*—If the Gospel brought salvation to those only who were possessed of some amiable qualities, or to those who had committed only a certain number of offences; if it made any limitation or exception whatever in its offers of mercy; if it provided pardon, but not strength, or grace to begin our course, but not grace to persevere; if, in short, it omitted any one thing which any sinner in the universe could need, then some persons might say, It is not commensurate with my necessities. But we defy the imagination of man to conceive any case which the Gospel cannot reach, or any want which it cannot satisfy.

They cannot say that it is *unreasonable in its demands.*—It does indeed require an unreserved surrender of ourselves to God: and on this account it appears to many to be strict and severe. But let any one examine all its prohibitions and all its commands, and he will find them all amounting in fact to these two; "Do thyself no harm;" and, "Seek to be as happy as thy heart can wish." If there be any thing in the Gospel which bears a different aspect, it is owing entirely to our ignorance of its real import. The more thoroughly the Gospel is understood, the more worthy of acceptation will it invariably appear.]

The only true reason is, that they "hate the light"—

[Till men are truly converted to God, "their deeds are universally evil;" yea "every imagination of the thoughts of their hearts is evil, only evil, continually." Now the Gospel is a light which shews their deeds in their proper colours.

It reproves their ways.—They have been "calling good evil, and evil good; and putting bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter." In reference to these things, it undeceives them. It declares plainly, that they who do such things as they have done, and perhaps have accounted innocent, shall not inherit the kingdom of God.

It mortifies their pride.—It not only shews them that they are obnoxious to the wrath of God, but that they are incapable of averting his displeasure by any thing which they themselves can do. It brings down the proud Pharisee, and places him on a level with publicans and harlots. It requires every man to acknowledge himself a debtor to Divine grace for every good thing that he either has or hopes for. All this is extremely humiliating to our proud nature.

It inculcates duties which they are unwilling to perform.—Humility and self-denial, renunciation of the world and devotedness

devotedness to God, enduring of shame and glorying in the cross; these, and many other duties, it enjoins, which to our carnal and corrupt nature are hateful in the extreme; yet the Gospel inculcates them with a strictness not to be lowered, a plainness not to be misinterpreted, and an authority not to be withstood.

These, these are the grounds on which the Gospel is rejected. If it would admit of persons following their own ways, or of their accommodating its precepts to their own views or interests, they would give it a favourable reception. But as it requires all to be cast into the very mould which it has formed, and will tolerate not the smallest wilful deviation from its rules, it is, and must be, odious in the eyes of the ungodly: "they love darkness rather than it; nor will they come to it, lest their deeds should be reproved."]

A just view of these things will prepare us for contemplating,

III. Their guilt and danger in rejecting it—

Doubtless every kind of sin will be a ground of "condemnation." But men's hatred of the light is that which chiefly, and above all other things,

1. Aggravates their guilt—

[The Gospel is a most wonderful provision for the salvation of fallen man. It is the brightest display of Divine wisdom, and the most stupendous effort of Divine goodness. The rejection of this therefore, especially as proceeding from a hatred of it, argues such a state of mind as no words can adequately express. The malignity of such a disposition rises in proportion to the excellence of the Gospel itself. We presume not to weigh the comparative guilt of men and devils, because the Scriptures have not given us sufficient grounds whereon to institute such a comparison: but the guilt of those who reject the Gospel far exceeds that of the heathen world: the wickedness of Tyre and Sidon, yea, of Sodom and Gomorrah, was not equal to that of the unbelieving Jews: nor was the guilt of those Jews, who rejected only the warnings of the Prophets, comparable to that of those who despised the Ministry of our Lord. In like manner, they who live under the meridian light of the Gospel in this day will have still more, if possible, to answer for, than the hearers of Christ himself; because his work and offices are now more fully exhibited, and more generally acknowledged. And in the day of judgment the Gospel will be as a millstone round the neck of those who rejected it: not having been a savour of life unto their salvation, it will be a savour of death unto their more aggravated condemnation.]

2. Insures

2. Insures their punishment—

[If men did not hate the Gospel itself, there would be some hope that they might in due time embrace it, and be converted by it. If they would even come to the light in order that the true quality of their works might be made manifest, then we might hope that they would be convinced of their wickedness, and be constrained to flee from the wrath to come. But when they dispute against the truth, and rack their invention in order to find out objections against it; when they indulge all manner of prejudices against the Gospel; when they withdraw themselves from the Ministry of those who faithfully preach it, and say, as it were, to their Minister, "Prophesy unto us smooth things, prophesy deceits;" what hope can there be of such persons? Their hearts are so hardened, that it is scarcely possible to make any impression upon them: if a ray of light do shine into their minds, they will endeavour to extinguish it as soon as possible; they will go to business, to pleasure, to company, yea, to intoxication itself, in order to stifle the voice of conscience, and to recover their former delusive peace. Alas! they are not only perishing of a fatal disorder, but they reject with disdain the only remedy that can do them good: they therefore must die, because they persist in drinking of the poisonous cup that is in their hands, and dash from their lips the only antidote and cure.]

APPLICATION—

In so saying, thou reprovest *us*—

[Behold! we declare unto you, that light, even the glorious light of the Gospel of Christ, is now come into the world — — —

Ye *lovers of darkness,* reject not this blessed Gospel. Little can sin contribute to your happiness, even while you are most capable of tasting its pleasures: but what it can do for you in a dying hour, or in the day of judgment, it is needless for me to say. Let it not then keep you from coming to the light. Surely it is better that "your deeds should be reproved," while you have opportunity to amend them, than that you should continue in them till you experience their bitter consequences. You would not travel in the dark when you could enjoy the light of day, or refuse the assistance of a guide that would lead you into the path which you professed to seek. Only then act for your souls as you would do in your temporal concerns, and all shall yet be well. Believe in Christ, and you shall yet be saved by him; as well from the commission of sin, as from the condemnation due to it.

Ye *who profess to love the light,* be careful to "walk as children of the light." Bring every thing to the touchstone of

of God's word. Try your spirit and temper, as well as your words and actions by this test. See whether you take the precepts of Christ as your rule, and his example as your pattern. For the sake of the world too, as well as for your own comfort, you should come continually to the light. If you would conciliate their regard for the Gospel, or remove their prejudice from yourselves, you should "*make your works manifest* that they are wrought in God." You should let your light shine before men, that they, seeing your good works, may glorify your Father that is in heaven.]

DCCCIII.

CONVERSION OF SOULS A GROUND OF JOY.

John iii. 29, 30. *He that hath the bride is the bridegroom: but the friend of the bridegroom, which standeth and heareth him, rejoiceth greatly because of the bridegroom's voice. This my joy therefore is fulfilled. He must increase, but I must decrease.*

OF all the passions in the human breast, there is none more hateful than envy. When suffered to reign without controul, there is not any thing which it will not perpetrate. The rage of Cain, the conspiracy of Joseph's brethren, the implacable enmity of the Jewish priests against the Lord Jesus Christ, clearly shew to what cruelties it will impel those who are under its dominion. Doubtless in those who have the smallest degree of piety, this malignant principle is weakened, and in a measure subdued; but it is not eradicated: it is one of those corruptions, which, by varying their appearances, retain possession of us under the semblance of good: nor, till we have made very considerable advances in the Divine life, are we able fully and effectually to guard against its deceitful workings. We are assured that Joshua was truly pious; yet from an envious zeal for his Master's honour he was desirous of silencing those who by Divine inspiration prophesied in the camp[a]. The Disciples of our Lord were actuated by no better principle, when they forbad a person to cast out devils in his name, because he did not

[a] Numb. xi. 27—29.

not follow with them[b]. The complaint which John's disciples also made to him respecting the multitudes who submitted to the baptism of Jesus, originated in the same feeling. Some Jews had taken occasion, from Jesus re-baptizing the disciples of John, to represent John and Jesus as "opposing each other; and, from the difficulties of determining which of the two was right, they maintained that it was better to adhere to the lustrations appointed by Moses, than to comply with the rites which these rival innovators were introducing. The disciples of John, fearing that their Master's credit would suffer, and his influence be subverted, come to him to complain of Jesus for usurping an authority that did not belong to him, and for undermining the authority of John, from whom, in fact, he had derived his influence. In answer to this complaint, John reminds them, that the very testimony which he had borne to Jesus, was sufficient to shew them their error: for he had from the beginning represented his own office as a short and temporary one, which was to cease, as soon as the attention of men should be turned to Him, whose Forerunner he was: and consequently, that the accomplishment of this great object should be to them a source, not of pain and grief, but of gratitude and thanksgiving. This idea he illustrates by the similitude of a bridegroom delighting in his bride, and thereby exciting in his friends, not an envious repining, but a sympathetic joy. As for the diminution of his own influence, *this*, he tells them, was agreeable to the very design of his coming; and, like a star which had served its purpose in the night, he was contented to be eclipsed, now that the Sun of righteousness had risen to illumine the world.

From this general view of our text, we observe,

I. That the conversion of souls to Christ is a ground of joy—

The success of a bridegroom who has obtained possession of his bride, is usually deemed a ground of joyful congratulation. Now the conversion of a soul

[b] Mark ix. 38.

soul to Christ is fitly represented under this similitude. The Scripture often speaks of him as the Husband of his people [c], and of the Church as his Bride [d]. To mark this correspondence, is needless: indeed, it is better to take it in a general view, than to attempt to trace it in particulars [e]. Suffice it to say, that the metaphor is just; that all who are truly converted give up themselves to Christ, and are thereby made partakers of all that he possesses.

Contemplate now what a ground of joy this is,

1. To the Believer—

[Consider from what a state he is taken: how mean by nature! how vile by practice [f]! ——— Consider to what a state he is raised: to what exalted honour! to what immense wealth! to what unspeakable felicity! ——— Has not such an one good reason to rejoice?]

2. To the heavenly Bridegroom—

[We know that, strictly speaking, he is not capable of having his happiness increased by any thing that we can do: he is altogether independent, and self-sufficient. Nevertheless, the Scriptures speak of him as still affected with joy and sorrow, just as he was in the days of his flesh. In conformity then with them, let us think, what must be his feelings, when he sees the blessed ends of his incarnation and death accomplished! ——— To convert and save sinners was the end of all that he did and suffered for us; and when he beholds them converted to himself, "he sees of the travail of his soul, and is satisfied [g]". To illustrate this idea, he gives us a variety of parables [h]; yea, he condescends to use by the prophet the very similitude in the text, in order to express the satisfaction of his soul in such events [i] ———]

3. To the Bridegroom's friend—

[As the friends both of the bride and bridegroom are often accessary to their union, and rejoice when they see the wishes of all the parties accomplished, so the friends of Christ, his Ministers especially, exert themselves to bring sinners unto him. It is for this they labour, for this they pray; yea,

[c] Isai. liv. 5. Hos. ii. 19, 20. [d] Eph. v. 23, 25, 26, 27, 31, 32.

[e] The greatest delicacy should studiously be observed on all such subjects as these.

[f] Ezekiel through the whole 16th chapter strongly describes this: but the foregoing caution must not be forgotten in following his train of ideas.

[g] Isai. liii. 11. [h] Luke xv. 5, 6; 9, 10; 23, 24. [i] Isai. lxii. 5,

yea, for this they live, and for this they are content to die. Their one object is, that sinners may be born to God, and be united to Christ in the bonds of an everlasting covenant. In the pursuit of this, their labours, their anxieties, their sufferings are great——— Can they then do otherwise than rejoice, when they see that they have not "laboured in vain or run in vain?" If they "travail, as it were, in birth, whilst they stand in doubt," must they not rejoice, when their doubts are all dispelled? See how Paul rejoiced in the conversion of men[k]: and such are the feelings of every Minister, in proportion as he is animated with Christian zeal and love———]

Whilst the Baptist thus disinterestedly declares that the conversion of sinners to Christ was to him a source of joy, he predicts,

II. That it shall advance in spite of every obstacle—

Those who are the instruments of diffusing the knowledge of Christ must wax and wane: however distinguished they may be for a time, they must soon "decrease." But Christ, and his interests, must increase."

He must increase,

1. In the estimation of his chosen people—

[The envy of some, and the malignity of others, will be exerted to damp the ardour of our affections, and to shake our fidelity towards him: and, where a profession of regard for him has been lightly taken up, the enemies of Christ will succeed in drawing us from our allegiance to him. But, if we "have received the grace of God in truth," we shall never yield to their solicitations: and, "if any go out from us, it is because they were not of us: for, if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us[l]." The true Spouse of Christ may be tried and tempted; but she will never renounce her connexion with him, or be unfaithful to her engagements. The more she is assaulted from without or from within, the more she will flee to him for succour: and her experience of his kindness will endear him to her ever more and more; so that her love to him will be more ardent, her affiance in him more uniform, and her adherence to him more determined. Never will he be more dear to her, than when she has suffered the loss of all things for him. The language of her heart will be, "Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire in comparison of thee:" and "all other things will be counted but dross and dung in comparison

[k] 1 Thess. iii, 7—10. [l] 1 Pet. ii. 19.

comparison of the knowledge of him." In short, she will "grow in grace, as she grows in the knowledge" of her Divine Husband ———]

2. In the estimation of the world at large—

[The Baptist's words were soon verified: for, in the space of a few years, the knowledge and love of Christ were diffused throughout all the Roman empire. But his influence is yet only in its commencement. There is a time coming when it will extend to the remotest corners of the earth: "All kings shall fall down before him; all nations shall do him service." "All shall know him, from the least unto the greatest;" and "all the kingdoms of the world become the kingdoms of our Lord" — — — "Then shall his Wife have made herself ready, and the marriage of the Lamb shall come: and blessed indeed will they be who shall then be called to the marriage supper of the Lamb[m]." This is "the increase" which we assuredly look for; and "of it there shall be no end[n]."]

ADDRESS,

1. Those who profess to desire an union with Christ—

[Happy they who feel a desire after him! ——— But there must be in every one of us a meetness for him, before he will acknowledge us as his. Let not this however be misunderstood. There cannot be in us any thing that can *deserve* his love, nor any thing that shall *induce him* to set his love upon us: we have not a good thought or desire which has not been first of all given us by him. But still, if we would be his in deed and in truth, we must have our desires supremely fixed on him, and every adulterous affection mortified. It is not a divided heart that he will accept: we must give ourselves wholly to him; or he will never admit us into the relation of his Spouse. See what holy jealousy St. Paul manifested on this head; and with what tender concern he urged the consideration of this subject on his Corinthian converts[o] ——— So, Beloved, we would urge it upon you. Deceive not your own souls. In forming human connexions, we may impose upon one another; but we can never impose on him: and if we would be acknowledged by him as his Bride, we must present ourselves to him as a chaste virgin, with a determination to be his, even his alone ———]

2. Those who profess to be actually united to him—

[It

[m] Rev. xix. 7—9. & xxi. 9—11.
[n] Isai. ix. 7. Dan. ii. 44. & vii. 27.
[o] 2 Cor. xi. 2, 3.

[It is scarcely needful to say, that you must endeavour to "walk worthy of your high calling." If you profess to stand in such a relation to the Lord Jesus Christ, "what manner of persons ought you to be in all manner of conversation and godliness!"[q]. See then that you live in a state of constant communion with him[p], and of entire dependence on him[q]———Be zealous for his honour, and studious to bring forth the fruits of righteousness to his praise and glory[r]———

Endeavour also to commend him unto others. There is no room for jealousy here. The light of his countenance, like the light of the sun, will not be the less enjoyed by you because it is imparted to others: on the contrary, the more successful you are in bringing others into a participation of his benefits, the more will your own souls overflow with joy. And the very weakest amongst us, that is really the Bridegroom's friend, shall find that he does not testify of Christ in vain: however incapable he may feel himself to recommend the Saviour to others, he shall see some fruit of his labour, and have reason to say, with John, "This my joy is fulfilled."]

[p] 1 John i. 3. [q] 1 Cor. i. 30. John i. 16. [r] Rom. vii. 4.

DCCCIV.

THE WORSHIP WHICH GOD REQUIRES.

John iv. 24. *God is a Spirit: and they that worship him, must worship him in spirit and in truth.*

BRETHREN, you are all upon the brink of eternity. You are all sinners. As sinners, you stand in need of mercy at the hands of God: and God is willing to bestow mercy upon every one of you, without exception. But he must be inquired of, in order that he may do this for you: and he must be inquired of, not in a cold and formal manner, but in sincerity of heart; for "He is a Spirit; and all who worship him, must, as my text informs you, worship him in spirit and in truth."

Let this declaration sink down into your ears; and let it operate strongly on your minds, whilst we contemplate it;

I. As an answer to a particular inquiry—

Our Lord was conversing with a woman of Samaria, and had shewn to her that he was perfectly acquainted with all the evils she had committed in her former life, and with those in the indulgence of which she was still living. She, not wishing to hear any thing further upon a subject so painful to her mind, sought to turn the conversation into another channel; and for that purpose inquired what his sentiments were on a point that was at issue between the Jews and the Samaritans, namely, Whether God was to be worshipped at Jerusalem, or at Mount Gerizim in Samaria? Our Lord, in reply to her question, tells her, that the time was now come, when the Father was no longer to be worshipped in any one place more than another; but that in every place under heaven, those, and those only, should have access to him, who "worshipped him in spirit and in truth."

This directly met the inquiry which had been made—

[Till that time "bodily exercise" had certainly prevailed in the services of God's people, whose access to him was chiefly in the use of prescribed forms, which were shadowy and typical, and were confined to one city, and to one particular building in that city. The directions which God had given in relation to this matter, even before his people came into possession of the Promised Land, were very specific: "Unto the place which the Lord your God shall choose out of all your tribes to put his name there, even unto his habitation shall ye seek, and thither shalt thou come; and thither ye shall bring your burnt-offerings, &c. &c. and there ye shall eat before the Lord your God[a]." At the time when the Temple of Solomon was consecrated, the people were instructed, that if they should go out to battle, or be carried captives to a foreign land, they must turn towards that place, when they made their supplications to the Lord for help or mercy: and an intimation was given, that, even if they should "return to God with all their heart and all their soul," it would not suffice, unless they also "directed their prayers towards that place[b]." From hence, as well as from the examples of their holiest prophets[c], they were led to suppose that no prayer would be accepted, but such as should be offered in that precise manner. There was indeed under that very dispensation ample evidence that that conclusion was erroneous: for God had said, "The heaven is my throne, and the

[a] Deut. xii. 5—7. [b] 1 Kin. viii. 44, 48.
[c] Ps. xxviii. 2. Dan. vi. 10.

the earth is my footstool: Where is the House that ye build unto me? and where is the place of my rest? To this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and that trembleth at my word[d]." Still, however, this matter was not generally understood, till our blessed Lord proclaimed, that Jehovah was a Spirit, and therefore not confined to any place, but pervading all space, and accessible to all who desired to draw nigh unto him. He no longer now was to be approached with mere bodily service, or in carnal ordinances, but "in spirit," as opposed to the one, and "in truth," as opposed to the other: and all who so approached to him should never be permitted to "seek his face in vain."]

In this view it is of importance to us also—

[We are apt to lay an undue stress on externals; and to imagine, that a peculiar measure of acceptance is to be found at the table of the Lord, than at any other time or place. (Let me not be here misunderstood, as though I would undervalue the ordinance of the Lord's Supper: for it is our bounden duty to commemorate our Lord's death in that ordinance; and from a *spiritual* and *believing* participation of the bread and wine, we may undoubtedly expect the richest benefits.) But from a mere formal attendance on that ordinance we receive no more good, than from a similar attendance on the common Services of the Church. It is to the heart alone that God looks: if that be not right towards him, no service whatever can be "acceptable in his sight:" but, if that be under the influence of penitence and faith, its offerings, under whatever circumstances they be presented, shall surely come up with acceptance before him.]

That this truth may be more fully brought before you, I shall consider the text,

II. As an instruction suited to all times and circumstances—

The thing which God expects, is, that there be a correspondence between the feelings of our heart, and the offerings of our lips—

[If, for instance, we confess our sins before him, it is not sufficient that our *words* be humble: our *spirit* must be humble too, and a holy penitential sorrow must fill our hearts. If we present our petitions before him, it is not sufficient that we ask for such things as are good and desirable, but we must feel an ardent desire after them in our souls, and plead for them with an importunity suited to the importance of them. So

[d] Isai. lxvi. 1, 2.

So also, if we return thanks to God, we must not rest in unmeaning compliments, but adore and magnify our God from our inmost souls. If there be not this correspondence between our feelings and our words, what "truth" is there in us? Our services are no better than a solemn mockery, that must offend, rather than please, the Majesty of heaven.]

Such sincerity the very nature of God requires—

["He is a Spirit," that pervades all space. He is equally present with all his creatures; nor is there a thought in the heart of any person in the universe, that is not "naked and open before him." Were he able to behold our actions only, he might be pleased with our services, though unaccompanied with any devout affection: but when "he searcheth the heart, and trieth the reins," and "weigheth" with infallible accuracy "our very spirits," how can he listen to our heartless addresses with any satisfaction? Verily such prayers must be, as he declares they are, an utter "abomination unto him." When some under the Jewish dispensation brought to him "the blind, and the lame, and the sick, for sacrifice," he appealed to them, "Whether it was not evil?" "Go," says he, "offer these now unto your Governor; Will he be pleased with you, or accept your persons[e]?" What then must he say to those who think to impose upon him by prayers which proceed "from the lips only, whilst the heart is far from him[ee]?" Assuredly he will say, "Bring no more such vain oblations," ye hypocrites, for "in vain do ye worship me:" "your most solemn services are an iniquity" which I utterly abhor, and "I am weary to bear them[f]."]

Unite with me then, whilst I make your prayers a subject of strict INQUIRY—

[It is to be feared that many of you, who would yet wish to be thought good Christians, live without even the form of prayer. Look back only to this very morning; look back to the past week; look back throughout your whole lives; and see, Whether you have ever spent one single hour in secret prayer to God? Ah! does not conscience condemn the greater part of you? Have not many of you, as far as prayer is concerned, lived rather like brute beasts, than as rational and immortal Beings? — — — Or, supposing you have kept up a form of prayer, has it not been a mere form? You who teach your children to repeat some form of prayer in your presence, know very well that *theirs* is not prayer: and what is yours better than theirs? Your heavenly Father, in whose presence you read or repeat your forms, knows how to estimate them, whilst they are offered without any suitable emotions.

The

[e] Mal. i. 8. [ee] Matt. xv. 7—9. [f] Isai. i. 11—14.

The way for you to judge of them is this: Set before your eyes a person perishing in the sea, and supplicating deliverance from his perils; and then compare your feelings with his. His feelings you can easily conceive: and if yours have no correspondence with them, no such sense of danger, no such desire of help, no such thankfulness for the efforts used in your behalf, you have yet to learn the nature of prayer, and yet to begin that work, without which you must perish in your sins———]

But let me not conclude without adding a few words of ENCOURAGEMENT—

[It is not improbable that some may be ready to write bitter things against themselves, because they find not fluency in prayer. But it is not by our fluency in utterance that God judges of our prayers, but by the humility of our minds, and the fervour of our desires. A sigh, or groan, proceeding from a broken and contrite heart, is of more value in his sight, than the richest effusions of eloquence that ever proceeded from the lips of man. Never was there a more acceptable prayer offered by mortal man than that of the Publican, "God be merciful to me a sinner!" Take courage then, ye who are dejected because ye find not such utterance as ye could wish. "God knoweth the mind of the Spirit:" and it is in sighs and groans chiefly that "his Spirit maketh intercession in us." Only let there be a sincerity of heart before him, and your very breathings shall be heard, and descend in blessings on your souls; for "he seeketh such to worship him," and will fulfil the *desire* of them that so approach him. If only you "*look to* him, you shall be lightened;" and if you *hope in* him, you shall assuredly be made partakers of his kingdom and glory.]

DCCCV.

CONVERSION OF THE SAMARITANS.

John iv. 41, 42. *And many more believed, because of his own word; and said unto the woman, Now we believe, not because of thy saying; for we have heard him ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world.*

THE conversion of the Gentiles was not an object of our Lord's personal ministrations: "he was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." Yet there were some particular occasions whereon he testified his regard for them, and gave them pledges of

of that mercy which was afterwards to be displayed towards them by the ministry of his Apostles. Of this we have an instance in the passage before us. He not only declared his Messiahship to the Samaritan woman whom he met at Jacob's Well, but spent two days with the Samaritans in the city of Sychar, and converted numbers of them to the obedience of faith. From the testimony which she gave of him, they entertained high thoughts of his character; but from a personal acquaintance with him they were convinced that he was the Saviour of the world. This is the account which they themselves gave of their own experience: and from it we shall take occasion to,

I. Distinguish between the kinds of faith here mentioned—

We ought to seek clear views of religion in general, but especially of its fundamental points. Now there is no subject more important, nor any about which more mistaken notions are entertained, than the nature of saving faith. But the distinction is here drawn for us with great accuracy.

The faith which the Samaritans first exercised was founded on mere report—

[The woman had testified to them that Jesus had told her all the secrets of her heart, even such as could be known only to the Most High God: and had appealed to them whether this was not a convincing evidence that he was the long-expected Messiah. Her argument was plain and conclusive: and, as she had no motive for deceiving them, they believed her report of him, and acknowledged the justness of her conclusion.

We do not mean to disparage this kind of faith: it was good as far as it went; and it was productive of solid benefit to the persons who possessed it, inasmuch as it removed all their prejudices, and disposed them to form a more accurate judgment for themselves. But still we cannot regard this faith in any other light than as a speculative assent, grounded upon human testimony. It seems to have been not unlike to that which is so common amongst ourselves, which arises from a view of the evidences of our religion. We see that all the ancient types and prophecies were fulfilled in Christ, and that most unquestionable miracles were wrought by him and his Apostles

Apostles in confirmation of his word; and therefore we say that he is, and must be, the Messiah. Yet those who are most versed in this kind of reasoning, are not always suitably affected with it: their knowledge of Christianity is, in many cases, merely speculative, residing in their heads, but never descending into their hearts, nor influencing their lives. We cannot therefore consider this as a saving faith: being unproductive of good works, it is dead; and, if carried no further, will leave the possessor of it in the state of those unhappy spirits, of whom it is said, "They believe, and tremble[a]."]

The faith to which they afterwards attained, was founded on their own experience—

[During the two days that our blessed Lord staid among them, they heard him discourse on the things relating to his kingdom. They perceived that "he spake as never man spake;" and "his word was with power." As it had before proved the heart of the woman at the well, so it searched their hearts, and disclosed to them all their hidden abominations. It shewed them, that they themselves were lost, yea, that the whole world also was in a perishing condition; and that He was sent of God on purpose to deliver them. From the correspondence which they saw between the character he sustained and the necessities they felt, they were assured "that he was the Christ, the Saviour of the world:" and they determined to rely on him, as *their* Saviour and *their* Redeemer.

Now this was saving faith: it brought them fully to Christ for the ends for which he was sent into the world: "With their hearts they believed on him unto righteousness; and with their mouths they made confession unto salvation[b]." This faith was very different from that which they first exercised: it was more *distinct*, more *assured*, more *influential:* they had more full and complete views of the objects of Christ's mission ——— they "had within themselves a witness" of the suitableness and sufficiency of his salvation———and they instantly became his open and avowed disciples, in spite of all their former prejudices, and the prejudices of all around them———

Certainly we must look for good works as fruits and evidences of this faith: but this faith, supposing it to be sincere, will assuredly issue in salvation.]

We proceed to notice,

II. The importance of making this distinction—

Two facts will serve to illustrate this:

1. For

[a] Jam. ii. 17, 19.

[b] Rom. x. 10.

1. For want of distinguishing *aright*, many sincere persons are distressed—

[The nature of saving faith has, as might well be expected, been a subject of controversy in the Christian world: and it is to be lamented, that, whilst some have placed the standard too low, others have raised it too high. A full assurance of our own personal acceptance with God has been supposed by many to be an essential part of true faith: and hence multitudes who have really "fled to Christ for refuge as to the hope set before them," are disquieted from day to day, because they do not feel in themselves that assurance. But God does not require us to believe more than he himself has revealed: and where has he revealed that any particular individual amongst us is in a state of salvation? or where has he said that the belief of our own personal interest in Christ is necessary in order to our obtaining an interest in him? Indeed, such a declaration would be absurd: it would be a contradiction in terms: it would require us to believe that a thing does exist, in order that it may exist; which is as absurd, as to believe that we *are* well, in order that we *may be* well; or that we *are* in heaven, in order that we *may be* in heaven. A thing must exist, before we can know that it exists; and therefore the knowledge of our acceptance with God cannot precede that acceptance; much less can it be necessary in order to our acceptance with him. As for straining metaphorical expressions in order to found doctrines upon them, it is injudicious in the extreme. It is far better to examine what that faith was, which was exercised by the saints of old, and which they found effectual to their salvation: and if we do that, we shall always find, that the faith by which they were saved, was a faith of *affiance*, and not that which is generally (but improperly) called a faith of *assurance*. Assurance is necessary, so far as it relates to Christ's ability and willingness to save us; but it is not necessary in relation to our own personal acceptance with him: this is desirable, no doubt, and a great source of comfort to the person who possesses it: but they who do not possess it may yet be in a state of salvation, and enjoy much consolation in the hope that they shall not finally be cast out.

Is there any one then amongst us under such circumstances; let him be of good courage, and in humble confidence cast himself upon the mercy of a reconciled God[c]. If he perish at the foot of the cross, he will be the first that ever perished there— — —]

2. For want of distinguishing *at all*, many insincere persons are ruined—

[The

[c] Isai. l. 10.

[The generality of persons seem to have no idea of any faith beyond that of a mere assent to certain propositions: and, if they have never set themselves to oppose Christianity, they take for granted that they are Believers. They were born in a Christian land, and have been educated in the Christian faith, and therefore they suppose that all is well. If they are licentious in their conduct, they will allow perhaps that they are deficient in their morals; yet they never suspect that they are materially wrong in their faith. But let them look around, and see what is the fruit of such faith as they possess: do they find it productive of any such effects as resulted from the faith of the first Christians? No: it leaves the possessors of it under the influence of the world, the flesh, and the devil, as much as the heathens themselves. How then can this be saving faith, of which it is said, It "purifies the heart," and "overcomes the world?" Yet under this delusion the generality of Christians both live and die———Is it not important then that they should be told, that "He is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is that circumcision which is outward in the flesh[d]?" Surely, whatever such persons may imagine, if ever they be brought to a saving knowledge of Christ, they will say, Now we believe in Christ, not because we have been told by our Parents that Christianity is true, but because we have heard him ourselves speaking to us in his word, and have felt that he is exactly such a Saviour as our necessities require.]

ADDRESS—

1. Let us not deceive ourselves by resting in a spurious and inefficient faith—

[St. Paul exhorts us to "examine ourselves, whether we be in the faith." And truly, when we see what little influence our faith has had upon us in times past, we may well suspect that it has not been of a right kind———If we continue in our delusion any longer, our error may soon be past a remedy———]

2. If enlightened ourselves, let us endeavour to enlighten others—

[Some may say, The vileness of my character, or the weakness of my capacity, render it unfit for me to attempt the instruction of others. But, if we only consider what honour God put upon this vile adulteress, in making her the instrument of drawing multitudes to Christ, we shall see that no one need be discouraged. An angel could be no more to us than what God made him: and God is pleased to use the weakest instruments, in order that "the excellency of the power

[d] Rom. ii. 28, 29.

power may appear to be of him." Let us therefore, each in his place and station, "declare what the Lord hath done for our souls;" and invite others to "come and taste how gracious the Lord is."]

DCCCVI.

CHRIST'S VINDICATION OF HIS OWN DIVINE CHARACTER.

John v. 21—23. *As the Father raiseth up the dead, and quickeneth them, even so the Son quickeneth whom he will. For the Father judgeth no man; but hath committed all judgment unto the Son: that all men should honour the Son, even as they honour the Father. He that honoureth not the Son, honoureth not the Father which hath sent him.*

AMONGST the various beauties by which the holy Scriptures are distinguished, we cannot but notice the artless simplicity with which the most sublime doctrines are delivered: they are not introduced with studied care, as they would be in human compositions; but arise incidentally, as it were, out of things which have but a remote connexion with them. Our blessed Lord had healed an impotent man at the pool of Bethesda, and had bidden him to take up his bed whereon he had lain, and walk away with it. The Jews, instead of glorifying God on the occasion, accused Jesus of violating the sabbath, and sought to kill him for having wrought this miracle on the sabbath-day. Our Lord, in vindication of himself, said, that he did no more than what his heavenly Father did; for his Father carried on his works both of providence and grace on the sabbath, as well as on other days; and that he himself did the same. At this answer the Jews took still greater offence. They saw that Jesus arrogated to himself a peculiar relation to God, even such a relation as was in effect an assumption of equality with God[a]. Hence "they sought the more to kill him," on account of what they conceived to be the summit of impiety and blasphemy. Jesus was now compelled to

[a] ver. 18.

to answer for himself on these grounds: and he told the Jews, that though they were correct in supposing him to claim an equality with God, they were mistaken in imagining that he therefore set up himself against God: on the contrary, there was a perfect union of sentiment and affection, of will and operation, between them; and neither did his Father, nor he, do any thing, without the most perfect concurrence and co-operation of the other: and so far was this from interfering with God's honour, that it was purposely arranged in the eternal counsels, in order that God might be honoured in the person of his Son: nor would God consider himself as honoured by any one, who would not honour him in the precise way which he himself had appointed.

Thus, out of this perverse conduct of the Jews arose an assertion and vindication of the divinity of Christ: they forced him to vindicate his apparent violation of the sabbath, and then to maintain the ground he had assumed in his vindication of it: and thus we are indebted to their perverseness for one of the clearest and most important statements in all the Sacred Volume.

Let us now, in discoursing on these assertions of our Lord, consider,

I. The account he gives of his own character—

Had the Jews been mistaken in what they supposed to be the scope of our Lord's assertions, he would have set them right: he would have told them plainly, that he did not intend to claim equality with God. But, instead of intimating that they had misunderstood his meaning, our Lord ackowledged that he did claim an equality with God; and, in confirmation of that claim, he asserted that a Divine authority belonged to him, both essentially, as God, and officially, as Mediator.

1. Essentially, as God—

[It is undoubtedly the Divine prerogative to "kill and to make alive[b]:" nor is it possible for any creature to restore to life that which is really dead. But the Lord Jesus Christ "quickeneth

[b] Deut. xxxii. 39.

"quickeneth whom he will." As the Father had, by the instrumentality of his Prophets, raised some to life, so Christ declared, that *he* would raise some by *his own* power. The persons, the time, the manner, were altogether at the disposal of his own will, by which alone he would be regulated in the dispensing of his favours. Moreover, he "quickeneth also the souls of men when dead in trespasses and sins;" and administers this gift also according to his own sovereign will and pleasure.

Would any mere creature have dared to arrogate to himself such a power as this? or would Jesus have given such an answer as this, if he had not designed to maintain his claim to an equality with God?]

2. Officially, as Mediator—

[When it was determined in the Divine counsels that the Son of God should assume our nature, it was determined also that the government of the universe, and of the Church more especially, should be committed to his hands; and that he should judge the world whom he had redeemed by his blood[c]. This, though primarily belonging, as it were, to the Father, was delegated to the Son, *because* he had assumed our nature[d], and because it was expedient that he who had "purchased the Church with his blood" should be empowered in his own person both to reward his friends and punish his enemies. But this office could not be executed by him, if he were not omniscient: he must know, not only every thought, word, and action, of all mankind from the beginning of the world to the end of it, but every possible circumstance that can at all tend to determine the precise quality of each. In a word, to exercise this office, he must be the omniscient God.

Judge then, whether in claiming this office he did not yet further confirm the suspicion of the Jews, that he affected an equality with God. It is not to be conceived, that, if this had not been his design, he would have answered in such a way: for, if he was not really and truly God, the whole tendency of his answer was to mislead their judgment, and to justify their accusations against him as an impious blasphemer.]

But, not contented with establishing his equality with the Father, he informs them of,

II. The regard which, in that character, he demands—

Though he affected not the honour that cometh of man[e], yet he could not possibly relinquish the honour which belonged to him both in his personal and official capacity: he could no more absolve the people from their

[c] Acts x. 42. & xvii. 31. [d] ver. 27. [e] ver. 41.

their allegiance to him as God, than he could cease to be God. He therefore shews them,

1. The extent of that honour which he requires—

[Whatever honour is due unto the Father, that Jesus claims as due unto himself; and he requires "all men" to pay it to him. Is God to be adored on account of his infinite perfections? Is he to be the one great object of our faith and love? Are we to confide in him under all circumstances, to obey him at all events, to delight ourselves in him at all seasons, even though death be threatened as the recompence of our fidelity? Such adoration, such faith, such love, such confidence, such obedience, are the unalienable right of the Lord Jesus: and it is particularly to be observed, that the putting of this honour upon the Lord Jesus was the very end and design of God the Father, when he delegated to the Son the office of governing and judging the world; "He committed all judgment to the Son, *that all men might honour the Son*, even as they honour the Father."]

2. The necessity of paying it to him—

[It might be thought sufficient to honour the Father: and so it was whilst the Father alone was known: but when he had revealed himself in the person of Christ, and "made all his glory to shine in his face;" when in Christ he had reconciled the world unto himself," and had "treasured up all fulness in Christ," and invested him with "all power in heaven and earth" for the completion of the great work that had been assigned him; then he demanded, that all men should honour him *in the person of Christ*: and, if any should refuse *so* to honour him, he would reject their persons, and abhor their offerings: yea, whatever reverence they might profess towards him, he would deal with them as rebels against his authority, and as contemners of his mercy.

Thus our Lord obviates the great objections which might be supposed to be against the validity of his claim. It might have been thought, that the Father would be jealous of his own honour, and consider any communication of Divine glory to his Son as an infringement of his own peculiar rights. But, behold! the very contrary is here declared: for, not only is that very communication designed by God, but all honour that is not accompanied with that communication is abhorred by him.]

Surely we may SEE from hence,

1. How defective are *the views of the generality*—

[The religion of the generality is only Judaism divested of its rites and ceremonies. They acknowledge a God, who, they

they think, has given us commandments; in obeying which we shall secure his favour, and by disobedience to which we shall incur his displeasure. It is true, if you begin to speak of Christ, they will acknowledge all that the Gospel relates concerning him: but they make very little account of him in their religious system. How different are their views from those suggested in the text! There we see, that Christ is the fountain of all spiritual life; and that he dispenses life to men according to his sovereign will and pleasure. There we see, that to honour Christ is the only true way of honouring the Father. There we see, also, what unsearchable riches of consolation are treasured up for the Believer; in that the very Person who bought him with his blood, is set over all things both in heaven and earth; and the very Person who paid that ransom for him, and renewed and sanctified him by his grace, shall judge him in the last day. Ah! what do nominal Christians lose by their ignorance of Christ! Dear Brethren, know that Christ is "the Alpha and Omega, the first and the last" in God's account; and that, if you would be saved by him, you must make him your "All in all."]

2. How defective is *the practice of us all*—

[We have spoken a little of the honour due unto the Father: but if we would have a fuller apprehension of it, let us contemplate the honour that is paid to him in heaven: let us imagine what are the feelings of all the angelic hosts, and of all the spirits of the just made perfect———Such then should be our views, and such our feelings towards the Lord Jesus Christ. We should begin our heaven upon earth. True it is, that when we speak of such a state, men will immediately begin to caution you against excess: they will tell you also that such a state would be incompatible with the necessary affairs of life. But where does God caution us against excess in religion, *provided our religion be of a right kind?* or what are those affairs which could not be conducted, if all men possessed the highest measure of true religion? Were Joseph, David, Daniel, impeded in their temporal duties by their religion? Or is there any one relation of life which will not be filled to more advantage by one who possesses true piety? The true reason why men so decry religion is, that they feel themselves condemned when they behold it exhibited in the conduct of the godly; and the less of such light they behold, the more quiet they hope to be in the prosecution of their evil ways. But we must not regard the cavils of men, or put them in competition with the commands of God. We know full well how all the ransomed of the Lord are occupied in singing praises "to Him that sitteth on the throne, and unto the Lamb:" What forbids then that we should be so occupied

occupied now? It is our duty, our interest, and our happiness, to "follow the Lord fully:" and I pray God we may also follow him, and delight ourselves in him; that when we are dismissed from the body, and translated to the realms of bliss, we may change our place and our company, but not our employment!]

DCCCVII.

THE RESURRECTION.

John v. 28, 29. *The hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation.*

FROM the resurrection of Christ we may infer, that we ourselves also shall rise from the dead. Indeed, he is called "the first-fruits of them that slept;" and therefore we may expect that there will be a complete harvest in due time. To this effect also we are informed in the words before us: from which we shall be naturally led to consider,

I. The certainty of the resurrection—

By many it has been "thought incredible that God should raise the dead." But "their error proceeds from not knowing the Scriptures, or the power of God[a]." Consider then,

1. What the Scriptures speak concerning it—

[They have recorded many instances wherein the dead have been raised[b]———Even in the Old Testament there are not wanting many strong intimations of it[c]———and in the New, it is declared in every page[d]———]

2. The power of God to effect it—

[See what God *has done:* look at the whole creation; and then ask, Whether He who formed the universe out of nothing, cannot as easily re-unite our scattered atoms (*whatever changes they may have undergone*), and restore to every one his own body? Yes; it was the voice of Jesus that spake the universe

[a] Matt. xxii. 23, 29.

[b] 1 Kin. xvii. 17—23. 2 Kin. iv. 32—37. Luke vii. 12—15. John xi. 43, 44. Acts ix. 36—41. and especially Matt. xxvii. 52, 53.

[c] Exod. iii. 6. with Mark xii. 26, 27. Isai. xxvi. 19. Hos. xiii. 14. with 1 Cor. xv. 54, 55. and especially Job xix. 25—27.

[d] *passim.* See 1 Cor. xv.

verse into existence; and that same voice will call forth into renewed existence all that are mouldered in their graves. See, moreover, what our God *is doing*. We forbear to notice the succession of day and night, and summer and winter; or the reviviscency of birds and insects after long intervals of suspended animation. We call your attention rather to the changes wrought upon the seed that is cast into the earth: it dies, and rises again, in appearance different, in reality the same. What more striking image of the resurrection could be presented before our eyes? Surely in this we have a pattern of the change that shall be accomplished in us at the last day; and a pledge that "our bodies, which are sown in corruption, weakness, and dishonour, shall be raised in incorruption, power, and glory."]

As no doubt can remain upon our minds respecting the certainty of the resurrection, let us next consider,

II. The issue of it—

There will be an immense difference between the states of different men—

[Who can conceive all that is implied in "a resurrection to life?" If in some respects we may borrow images from the present life in order to illustrate it, in other respects that new and heavenly life will form a perfect contrast to all that we now experience. It is true, that all the faculties of our bodies shall be employed in the service of our God: but it is also true, that they shall never clog the soul in its operations; their capacities shall be exceedingly enlarged; they shall never be subject to weariness or want of any kind; they shall be as full of activity and blessedness as the soul itself— — —

On the other hand, Who shall declare what is the full import of "a resurrection to damnation?" We are shocked at the very sound of the word "damnation:" how much more should we be so, if we knew all that is comprehended in it! It is in vain to attempt to describe the anguish which the body shall endure in the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone. But we are persuaded, that the soul will bitterly bewail the necessity it is under of being re-united to that body, which once, instead of governing, it pampered and obeyed— — — And its misery will be fearfully augmented by the increased capacity of anguish which it will derive from its union with the body— — —]

This difference will correspond with, and be founded on, their moral characters—

[The Scriptures uniformly declare the connexion that subsists

subsists between our present conduct and our future state. Nor need we be afraid of stating the truth precisely in the same manner, provided we bear in mind what is implied "in doing good, and doing evil." To do good, is, to serve God cheerfully and without reserve. Now the very first "commandment of God is, that we believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ." This at once lays the axe to the root of all self-righteousness; and necessitates us to look unto Christ both for righteousness and strength. And we do not hesitate to say, that all who serve God in conformity with this fundamental principle, shall have a resurrection to life.

If, on the contrary, we "do evil," *neglecting this adorable Saviour*, and living to ourselves rather than to him, we shall certainly "come forth to everlasting shame and contempt[e]."

Each of these truths is so firmly asserted in the Scriptures, that no doubt of them can be entertained[f]. We want only to have them brought home with more feeling to our hearts.]

ADDRESS—

[Consider for which of these states you are preparing. You may delay, under the idea that the time will never come: but "the hour is coming," as fast as the wings of time can bring it forward. Let not your preparation for it be deferred: for life is uncertain; and as death finds you, so will judgment find you. If you live, and die obedient followers of Christ, you will be happy. If you rely not on him, or devote not yourselves unreservedly to him, it will not be in the power of God himself to save you: for "he cannot deny himself;" and he has expressly said, that all such persons shall have "a resurrection to damnation."]

[e] Dan. xii. 2. [f] Gal. vi. 7, 8. Rom. ii. 6—10.

DCCCVIII.

CHRIST'S APPEAL TO THE SCRIPTURES.

John v. 39. *Search the Scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me.*

WHEN our Lord professed himself to be the promised Messiah, and claimed an authority equal to that of Almighty God, it was necessary that he should bring abundant evidence of his Divine mission, and prove, by testimonies of the most unquestionable kind, his title to the honour he assumed. Nor was he backward to give all the proof which the occasion

required. He appealed to the testimony of John the Baptist, whom the whole Jewish nation considered as a prophet, and whose testimony therefore ought to have great weight with them. He appealed also to his own miracles, which were so great and numerous as to be in themselves an indubitable evidence that God was with him. He further appealed to the testimony which his heavenly Father also had given to him at his baptism, both by an audible voice from heaven, and by the visible descent of the Holy Spirit upon him. Lastly, he appealed to the holy Scriptures, which the Jews themselves received as the word of God, and which bore testimony to him; even such testimony as would be found to agree exactly with his person and character in every respect. As these had existed for centuries, and might be compared with all that he had either done or taught, their testimony must be unexceptionable, and must carry conviction to every mind.

Though the Messiahship of Christ is universally believed amongst us, it will not be unprofitable to consider this appeal; in which is contained,

I. The general excellence of the Scriptures—

We would not disparage the writings of men—

[Books of science and philosophy have their use. Moral truth especially, as far as it is known and understood, cannot but prove advantageous to its possessor, though it may not produce all the effect that might be desired. True it is, that all the learning of Greece and Rome could not change the hearts of men; but it was useful to refine their manners, and, in some measure, to correct their habits; and experience proves, that though civilization is far enough from conversion, it opens a way for the easier reception of truth, and for the more profitable display of its energies when received. We must not therefore decry human learning, even where it is not conversant about religion: for it certainly tends to enlarge the understanding, to mature the judgment, and to call into activity the noblest faculties of our minds.]

But the Sacred Volume is of infinitely greater value than all others—

[Unenlightened men, even those of the greatest genius and erudition, have never been able to establish the certainty of

of a future state, much less to tell us what that state shall be, and how we are to secure a happy portion in it. Some philosophers have indeed reasoned well upon the subject, and come somewhat near the truth: but they were not able to affirm any thing in such a manner as to demand universal credit, or to influence any considerable portion of mankind. But the holy Scriptures reveal a future state with certainty: they have "brought life and immortality to light;" and shew us clearly, how eternal life is to be obtained. Even the Jewish Scriptures, though not very full upon these points, were yet so clear as to produce a general conviction in the whole nation, that eternal life was revealed in them. The Sadducees indeed, who were the free-thinkers of the day, denied the resurrection of the body; and it may be doubted whether they even believed the immortality of the soul: but these were an exception to the great mass of the Jewish people, whose sentiments in this respect were more agreeable to truth. In the New Testament, the way of life and salvation is made so clear, that "he who runs may read it:" so that the Sacred Volume, as we have it, as far exceeds all books of human composition, as the splendour of the meridian sun exceeds the faint radiance of a glow-worm. However we may admire the taste of some authors, or the energy and depth of others, we must ever give the pre-eminence to the Inspired Volume, and confess that to it alone are we indebted for any knowledge of eternal life. There we do not merely *think*, but *know*, that we have eternal life: we know how a sinner may be reconciled to God, and how eternal happiness may infallibly be secured.]

But our conviction of their excellence will be greatly heightened, if we proceed to notice,

II. The particular scope and intent of them—

Christ is the sum and substance of the Scriptures: and though they embrace a great multitude of subjects, their chief scope is to testify of him. They testify of him,

1. Plainly—

[It is not in dark ambiguous expressions, like those uttered by the heathen oracles, which were capable of being explained in different ways, so as to be accommodated equally to opposite events,—it is not in such language, I say, that the Scriptures speak of Christ: they speak of him with plainness and precision, insomuch that the time and place of his nativity were known as well before his advent as after it; and that too even by those who had not the grace to welcome his arrival.]

2. Copiously—

[But it was not in some few particulars only that mention was made of him. His person, his work, his offices, the nature of his salvation, the extent of his kingdom, were all delineated in the completest manner: in a word, the whole of "his sufferings, and the glory that should follow," were set forth with accuracy, though the Prophets themselves did not at the time comprehend the full import of the expressions they used. So exceeding copiously did the Prophets testify of him, that his whole life and character might be collected almost as fully from their writings, as from the Gospels themselves.]

3. Minutely—.

[We might conceive that prophetic language, whilst it appeared to speak largely of any character, might be easily applicable to different persons. But the prophecies relating to Christ are so minute, that it was not possible for conjecture to frame them, or for any conspiracy to fulfil them. Though a Jew, he was not to die a Jewish, but a Roman death: yet, though crucified, he was not to have all done to him which was common in such cases; for a bone of him was not to be broken. On the other hand, he was to experience much which was never inflicted on any in similar circumstances; for he was to be scourged before his crucifixion, and afterwards to be pierced to the heart with a spear. The taunts uttered by his enemies were literally foretold; as was also their cruelty, in offering him vinegar to drink in his last moments. The division of one of his garments into four parts, and the casting of lots for the other, were amongst the circumstances that no human being could have divined, and which no impostor would have ventured to predict. And who would have ever imagined that one so ignominiously treated in his death, should yet have his grave with the rich? The very price which was to be paid for his blood, together with the subsequent application of that money in the purchase of a potter's field, and the untimely death of the person that betrayed him, these, and a great variety of other circumstances equally minute, prove beyond a doubt, that he was the person testified of, and that the testimony borne to him was divine.]

4. Universally—

[Some of the Prophets lived at the distance of many hundred years from each other, so that there could be no conspiracy between them: and yet all testify of him. Moses declares, that the promise of his appearance was given to our first parents in Paradise: he marks the successive promises made to Noah, Abraham, and the Patriarchs: he himself

speaks

speaks of him in the plainest terms, and delineates his work and offices in numberless types and shadows. All the Prophets that arose in successive ages continued to point him out: and, if we had a perfect understanding of all their writings, we should see such a body of evidence as even the most enlightened at this day have scarcely any conception of. What we already behold is truly amazing; and proves beyond a possibility of doubt that Jesus is the Christ.

In a word, "the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy" from the one end of the Sacred Volume even to the other.]

Seeing that the Scriptures are replete with instruction, we can be at no loss to determine,

III. Our duty in reference to them—

We need only be informed that God has given us such writings, and we shall see at once that it is our duty to read them. But it is not a cursory perusal, such as curiosity may prompt us to, that will suffice: we must read them,

1. With sincerity—

[They are given, in order to be a light to our feet, and a lantern to our paths: and we must come to them with a disposition of mind to receive implicitly whatever they declare, and to fulfil, without reserve, whatsoever they require. Our frame should be precisely like that of Samuel, when he said, "Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth." The reply of the blind man, whose eyes Jesus had opened, shews what ought to be the leaning of our minds. Jesus said to him, "Dost thou believe on the Son of God?" to which he answered, "Who is he, Lord, that I may believe on him[a]?" Thus there should be in us no desire to lean to our own preconceived opinions, or to retain any of our former habits; but rather a readiness to comply with the whole will of God, and a desire to know it, in order to comply with it. It was the want of this disposition that caused the Jews to withstand all the evidence that our Lord adduced, as well as that which was contained in the Scriptures. Hence, as some understand the text, he said to them, "Ye *do* search the Scriptures, and think that on that account you have, and shall have, eternal life: but you are blinded by your own prejudices; and therefore, notwithstanding the ample testimony which the Scriptures bear to my person and character, you reject me, and ruin your own souls." On the other hand, it was from cultivating such a disposition of mind as this, that so many of the Beræans

[a] John ix. 35, 36.

Beræans were brought to the obedience of faith[b]: and we are authorized to declare, that no man shall search the Scriptures with such a spirit as this, without having his mind enlightened and guided into all truth[c].]

2. With diligence—

[The very term here used implies a great degree of diligence, such as miners use for the discovery of precious jewels, or as dogs employ in the pursuit of their prey[d]. It is thus that we are commanded to read the Scriptures, and it is to this alone that a successful issue is promised[e]. The formal habit which some have of reading the Psalms and Lessons for the day is but little calculated to answer the ends for which the Scriptures should be searched: it rather has a tendency to satisfy the minds of men, from the consideration that they have performed their appointed task. It is the meditating on the word, the applying it to their own hearts and consciences, the examining of themselves by it, and the endeavouring to get their souls cast into the mould of it; this it is that insures the blessing of God upon it; and this must be our daily habit, if we would have the word effectual for our own salvation[f].]

3. With prayer—

[The Scriptures are "a sealed book;" nor can any but God open and unfold them to us. Without the enlightening influences of His Spirit, all our diligence will be in vain. We see, in the instance of the Apostles, how incapable men are of comprehending the spiritual import of the Scriptures, even in the midst of all possible advantages, till God himself is pleased to give them a spiritual discernment[g]——— If *they* then, with such a teacher as Christ himself, and with the benefit of his instructions, in private as well as in public, for between three and four years together, yet needed to have their understandings opened before they could understand the Scriptures, we may be well assured, that this spiritual illumination is necessary for *us:* nor should we ever look into the Scriptures without first addressing our God in the words of David, "Open thou mine eyes, O Lord! that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law."]

4. With an especial view to a discovery of Christ—

[We have already seen that Christ is the sum and substance of the Scriptures. To make him known to us, in all the glory of his person, and in all the extent of his love, is God's design in revealing his word to us. When therefore we read the word, we should not be contented with attaining the

[b] Acts xvii. 11. [c] John vii. 17. [d] ἐρευνᾶτε.
[e] Prov. ii. 1—6. [f] Ps. i. 2. Josh. i. 8. [g] Luke xxiv. 45.

the knowledge of the facts contained in it, or even of the great duties it requires: we should have our eye fixed on Christ: we should see whence our need of him arose; what sort of a person he was to be; what he was to do and suffer for our salvation; how he answered to every part of the character that was given of him; how he is still carrying on in heaven the work which he began on earth; and how eternally blessed he will make his believing and obedient people. If we had already attained as much knowledge as ever the apostle Paul possessed, we should still be, like him, aspiring to know Christ more and more, and to get our knowledge more influential on our souls[h]. It is by "beholding the glory of Christ as revealed in the Gospel, that we are to be changed into his image from glory to glory by the Spirit of the Lord;" and, consequently, in order to experience the sanctifying efficacy of the word, we must search for clearer discoveries of Christ, and fuller manifestations of his power and grace to our souls.]

ADDRESS—

1. Be thankful for the holy Scriptures—

[It was but a small part of the Inspired Volume that David possessed; yet was it "dearer to him than thousands of gold and silver, and sweeter to him than honey and the honey-comb." How sweet then and precious should our Scriptures be, which contain so much clearer light, and which indeed render the Old Testament itself so much more luminous than it was in our Saviour's days! O, let not that blessed book lie by neglected: let it not be considered merely as a book suited to the capacity of children, and proper to be used in teaching them the rudiments of language. Let it rather be regarded as the word of the living God; and be venerated as the only source of all spiritual light and happiness.]

2. Improve them for the purpose for which they were given—

[They were given to reveal the way to life; and they bear testimony to Christ as being that way[i]. Say then with yourselves, "I am sailing towards the harbour of eternal rest; but the navigation is intricate and dangerous: nevertheless I have a chart, wherein every rock and shoal is marked; and I have a compass whereby I may securely steer my way." What would a mariner do under such circumstances? He might have a valuable library; but he would esteem all his books together as of no value, in comparison of such

[h] Phil. iii. 10. [i] John. xiv. 6.

such a chart: he might have a rich cargo; but he would throw it all overboard, rather than part with his compass. He would be making his observations; he would frequently take soundings, and compare them with his chart, in order that he might see whether he was steering right, or whether he had been driven either by winds or currents from his proper course. This is the method which we must adopt. It is for eternal life that we are pressing forward; and, if we strike upon a rock, we are lost for ever. The Lord grant that we may take heed to those means of preservation which he has given us, and "so pass through things temporal, as finally to attain the things eternal!"]

DCCCIX.

MAN'S INABILITY TO COME TO CHRIST.

John vi. 44. *No man can come to me, except the Father, which hath sent me, draw him.*

THERE are in the holy Scriptures many doctrines which prove an offence and a stumbling-block to the world: but the reason of their exciting disgust and aversion, must be looked for, not so much in the doctrines themselves, as in the depravity of the human heart. To a humble and contrite spirit every truth in the Bible will appear reasonable and worthy of God: it is the pride of man that takes offence at the Sacred Records, and that renders him unable to receive the declarations of God. Our blessed Lord had told the Jews repeatedly, that he came down from heaven: they knowing his mother and his reputed father, could not endure that he should arrogate to himself such high honour: but he informed them, that the ground of the offence was within themselves; they were blinded by their own prejudices, and fettered by their own lusts, so that nothing but the almighty grace of God could ever draw them to him in a becoming manner.

Now this subject is *difficult*; we shall therefore *explain* it: it is *deemed objectionable*, and therefore we shall *assign the reasons* of it: it is *liable to abuse*, and therefore we shall *guard* it.

I. It

I. It is *difficult*, and therefore we shall *explain* it—

To "come to Christ" is to believe on him for salvation—

[It cannot refer to a mere bodily approach; because in that sense the assertion would not be true. Our Lord himself explains his meaning, and informs us, that to come to him is of the same import with believing in him[a]. Our coming to him has respect to the characters which he sustains. Is he a Prophet? we must come to him for instruction: is he a Priest? we must come to him to make atonement for us: is he a King? we must come to him to deliver us from all our spiritual enemies. In whatever view he is represented in the Scriptures, whether as a sun to enlighten, a fountain to cleanse, a physician to heal, or as bread to support our lives, we should come to him, feeling our need of him under that very character, and relying on him to supply all our spiritual wants.]

In order to this, we should experience the drawings of the Father—

[When we speak of "the Father drawing us," we appear to some as if we ascribed to him an irresistible agency, and considered men as mere machines. But we entertain no such absurd unscriptural notions. It is not with the cords of a beast, or with force and violence, that God draws us, but, as the prophet well expresses it, "with the cords of a man, and and with the bands of love[b]," that is, by rational considerations, and by the sweet attractions of his love. Perhaps this subject will be best understood by a familiar illustration. How was it that Jacob was drawn into Egypt? He was made to feel the pressure of a very grievous famine: he was informed that there was plenty of corn in Egypt; and that his dearly-beloved Joseph was the Lord of all that land, and disposed of the good things thereof to whomsoever he would: he was told, moreover, that Joseph had expressly invited *him*; and had sent waggons for the conveyance of his family, together with abundance of provisions by the way: and finally, he was assured that, at the end of his journey, all the good of the land of Egypt should be his. Did he need, after this, to have a rope or chain fastened round him, and to be dragged into Egypt? No: all that he needed was faith, to believe the tidings; and when once he was fully persuaded of the truth of these things, he was willing of himself to go into that good land. It is thus that God draws his people: he causes us to feel our need of mercy; he informs us that our beloved Jesus has all heaven at his disposal; that he has sent to invite

[a] ver. 35. [b] Hos. xi. 4.

invite us to him, assuring us of whatever is needful by the way, and promising us all the glory of heaven at the end: and finally, he gives us faith to believe his testimony. Thus "he makes us willing in the day of his power[c];" and a thorough belief of these truths will bend the most stubborn heart, and overcome the most reluctant mind.]

Without these drawings we cannot come to Christ—

[We may give an assent to all the truths of the Gospel, and may profess an attachment to our Lord himself, without any such gracious influence; but we cannot really *come* to him in the manner before described, unless we be drawn by an almighty power. We can never apprehend him, till we are thus, as it were by a kind of magnetic influence, apprehended by him.]

Such is the plain import of the subject before us; but,

II. It is *deemed objectionable*, and therefore we shall *assign the reasons* of it—

There is no doctrine of the Bible that is loaded with more opprobrium than this: it is represented as grossly enthusiastic, and almost bordering on blasphemy. But the truth of it will immediately appear, if only we consider the grounds and reasons of it. It is founded,

1. On our *indisposition* to come to Christ—

[Consider what the coming to Christ implies: First it implies a sense of our lost state without him: and do men like to feel themselves guilty and undone? do they feel no backwardness to confess that they are justly exposed to everlasting misery? Next, it implies a renunciation of all dependence on ourselves: and is this pleasing to corrupt nature? Are we willing to believe ourselves so utterly destitute of wisdom, righteousness, and strength, that we must be altogether dependent on Christ, as much as a new-born infant is on its parent? Next, it implies a turning from every thing that is displeasing to Christ: but have we no reluctance to mortify our besetting sins, and to forsake the habits, maxims, company, and interests of a polluted world? Lastly, it implies that we give ourselves entirely up to Christ, to walk in a state of holy communion with him, and unreserved obedience to his will: but does man naturally affect such a life as this? Is

[c] Ps. cx. 3.

Is there nothing irksome to him in such restraints; nothing painful in such exertions?

Here then is one reason why we need the drawings of the Father in order to come to Christ. Our coming to Christ is altogether against the current of our corrupt nature [cc]: and as a river flowing to the ocean cannot turn back again to its source without the attractive influence of the heavenly bodies, so neither can we reverse all our natural habits and propensities without the drawings of our heavenly Father.]

2. On our *impotency*—

[The impotency of man to what is good is certainly rather of a moral than a natural kind: his inability is not like that which incapacitates him to stop the sun in the firmament; it consists principally in a want of inclination: yet, together with that, there is a positive weakness; there is even in a regenerate man "the flesh lusting against the Spirit, so that he cannot do the things that he would [d]." St. Paul himself complained, that "to will was present with him; but how to perform that which was good, he found not:" that "the good which he would, he did not; and that the evil which he would not, that he did: that when he would do good, evil was present with him [e]." And who amongst us has not found the same? Who has not felt wanderings of mind, yea, and lamentable obduracy of heart, in those seasons when he has earnestly desired to maintain communion with his Lord and Saviour? Who has not been made sensible that he is like a becalmed vessel; and that he spreads the sails in vain, until the wind arise to bear him onward in his voyage?

We need not then to inquire after any other reasons for the doctrine in the text: our own experience, together with that of the saints in all ages, amounts to a demonstration of the point; more especially because it is confirmed by the strongest declarations of Holy Writ. God himself has told us, that without Christ we can *do* nothing [f]; that we cannot, of ourselves, even *speak* a good word [g]; nay, that we have not sufficiency even to *think* a good thought [h]: that "God must give us both to will and to do [i]." If then "our sufficiency even for these things must be of God," how much more must a Divine influence be necessary in order to our coming fully and habitually to Christ, as the life and strength of our souls!]

We must not however be satisfied with establishing this doctrine; for,

III. It

[cc] Rom. viii. 7. 1 Cor. ii. 14.
[d] Gal. v. 17.
[e] Rom. vii. 18, 19, 21.
[f] John xv. 5.
[g] Matt. xii. 34. & 1 Cor. xii. 3.
[h] 2 Cor. iii. 5.
[i] Phil. ii. 13.

III. It is *liable to abuse;* and therefore we will *guard* it—

It is abused as much as any doctrine whatever;

1. By the ignorant and ungodly—

[When we tell them how they must come to Christ, and devote themselves to his service, they excuse themselves by saying that they cannot: and thus, in fact, they cast all the blame of their condemnation upon God, instead of taking it to themselves. But the impotency of which they complain is no excuse for them. Before they conclude themselves to be blameless, let them inquire, Whether they do all that they *can;* whether they read, and meditate, and pray, and watch, and strive as much as they *can?* If they do not improve aright the strength they have, what reason have they to complain that God has not given them more? They will not so much as "frame their doings to turn unto the Lord;" and therefore they are as deserving of punishment, as if they had had all the power in their own hands; if they be not faithful in the few things which they have, there is no reason to think that they would have been faithful in more, if more had been committed to them. With this accords our Lord's own interpretation of such excuses, and the sentence he will pronounce on those who offer them[k]: instead of standing excused before God, they will be condemned as wicked and unprofitable servants.

But such excuses are indeed the greatest aggravation of their guilt: for they amount only to this; "I love sin so much, that I cannot renounce it; and hate God so much, that I cannot bring my mind to love and serve him." And how would such an excuse sound in a court of judicature on behalf of a murderer? This man hates his fellow-creatures to such a degree, that he cannot help murdering them whenever he can get them within his reach? Would the people say, "Poor man, he ought not to be punished, for he cannot help it?" Would they not rather think, that the wickedness of his disposition was the greatest aggravation of his guilt, and that it would be the height of injustice to let him pass unpunished? The cases are altogether parallel: the conduct of each proceeds from his own depravity: and in either case increases, rather than diminishes, their desert of condemnation.]

2. By many professors of religion—

[Strange as it may seem, we must confess that there are many professors of religion who abuse most shamefully the doctrine of the text. When warned of their state, they will plead their weakness in extenuation of their guilt, and will cast

[k] Matt. xxv. 24-30.

cast the blame on God, just as the ungodly themselves are wont to do. But if there be any people under heaven more offensive to God than others, surely these must be they. The ignorant and ungodly are quite innocent, when compared with these. Truly the excuses of an anti-nomian professor are little short of blasphemy. O that all of that description might consider the fallacy and impiety of their pleas! But we would hope that no such professor is in this place: if however there should be one, we must declare unto him, that, whatever excuse he may make for his sinful practices or neglects, "he deceiveth his own soul, and his religion is vain." If God indeed were unwilling to help him, there might be some justice in his pleas. But who will dare to cast such a reflection upon him? The fault is wholly in the depraved wills of men: "Ye will not come unto me, that ye might have life." Let none then presume to charge God foolishly: if ever we would be right in his sight, we must trace all good to him, all evil to ourselves.]

ADDRESS,

1. To the self-confident—

[If you be not yet convinced of your need of Divine influences, go home, and try to perform some spiritual acts in your own strength: try to go to Christ with contrition; to cast yourself upon him with humble confidence; and to devote yourself to him in unreserved obedience. Do *this*, do it really, and with your whole heart, and we will retract all we have spoken; and confess either that the Bible is false, or that we have mistaken its true import. But we fear not the issue of such a trial: we are persuaded it would tend, more than any thing, to your conviction. Having within your own power the means of ascertaining the truth or falsehood of what you have heard, you will be utterly inexcusable if you neglect to do it.]

2. To the timid—

[Let it not be a source of discouragement to you that you feel your weakness: for "when you are weak, then are you strong." Can you do nothing of yourselves? then live the more dependent upon God: and "he will perfect his strength in your weakness." He has said, "Fear not, thou worm Jacob, thou shalt thresh the mountains." What a labour is this to be performed by a worm! yet it shall be done. Trust then in Him, and be of good courage: and He who "sent Christ to you," will draw you to him; till you are raised at last to a full enjoyment of his presence and glory.]

DCCCX.

CHRIST THE ONE SOURCE OF ETERNAL LIFE.

John vi. 67—69. *Then said Jesus unto the twelve, Will ye also go away? Then Simon Peter answered him, Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life: and we believe, and are sure, that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God.*

IT was said of our Lord by the aged Patriarch who took him in his arms at his presentation in the Temple, "Behold this child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel, and for a sign that shall be spoken against; that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed:" and this discovery of men's characters was universally produced by his ministrations. Nor was it occasioned by his doctrines only, but frequently by the manner in which they were promulged. His discourses abounded much in parabolical and figurative representations, which cast a veil of obscurity over them, and served as a touchstone to try the spirits of those who heard him. His statement of the new birth was for a time a stumbling-block to Nicodemus, who knew not what interpretation to put upon his words: and in like manner, his discourse respecting "eating his flesh and drinking his blood" offended many; insomuch that "they went back, and walked no more with him." His own Apostles scarcely knew how to receive his word; so that it seemed as if they also would depart from him. But they were of a more humble and teachable spirit; and therefore, when our Lord asked, if they also intended to forsake him, they expressed their abhorrence of such an idea, and their determination to adhere to him at all events.

I. *The question* which our Lord put to his Disciples, demands our first consideration—

Though it related to one particular occasion, it is suited to convey much general instruction. It shews us,

1. That

1. That the best of men are liable to depart from God—

[This is a truth of infinite importance, which yet many are very averse to hear. But who can doubt it in reference to *himself?* Who does not feel that he himself may fall, and that too into grievous sin, and into final condemnation? Advocates for human systems may say what they please on this subject; but there is not a humble Christian in the universe who does not feel this to be true in reference to himself: and if any choose to deny it, we shall oppose to him the example of the apostle Paul, who "kept his body under, and brought it into subjection, lest by any means, after having preached to others, he himself should be a cast-away[a]." In ourselves we are weak as new-born babes: it is God alone "that can keep us from falling;" and if ever we be saved at all, we must be "kept by the power of God unto salvation[b]."

But there is not that opposition between this doctrine and that of the perseverance of the saints that some imagine. A mother's care is a pledge for the security of her child: but that does not set aside the liability of the child to perish by hunger or cold, or a thousand other accidents; any of which things may at any time occur by the carelessness or death of its nurse. Thus our security is not in ourselves; but in our God: if left to ourselves for one moment, we should perish: and all our hope is in the tender care and mercy of our God. The only difference between the child and us is, that its guardian is weak and mortal; whereas ours is the Almighty and Unchangeable Jehovah, in whose power and fidelity alone our advantage consists.]

2. That the defection of some endangers the stability of others—

[We are easily wrought upon by the influence of bad example. "The mixed multitude in the wilderness fell a lusting," and soon drew after them the whole nation of Israel[c]. In the Gospels too we have many melancholy instances of the readiness even of good men to follow each other in what is evil. Peter, full of self-confidence, presumed to declare, that "though he should be called to die with his Lord, he would not deny him:" and then we are told, "Likewise also said all the Disciples[d];" so speedily were they led away by his example. On another occasion, we find them *all* "murmuring and full of indignation" about the expense which had been incurred for the purpose of honouring their Lord: and, when we come to inquire whence it all originated, we trace it all to Judas, who was

[a] 1 Cor. ix. 27. [b] Jude 24. 1 Pet. i. 5.
[c] Numb. xi. 4. [d] Matt. xxvi. 35.

was a thief and wanted to steal the money for his own use[e]. The instance of Barnabas also, and other Jewish Christians, who were led away by Peter's dissimulation, is precisely in point. Indeed, who that is at all conversant with the Christian world, has not seen, on many occasions, how rapidly a bad spirit in one diffuses itself through a whole Church? Good instruction and example operate very slowly and partially; but that which is evil spreads apace: "a little leaven will soon leaven the whole lump." It becomes us then to be on our guard against the contagion of evil. Doubtless these apostates thought that they had reason enough to forsake our Lord: but if we were left, like Paul, unsupported and unacknowledged by the whole Christian world[f], it would become us, like him, to maintain our stedfastness, and to "cleave unto Christ with full purpose of heart."]

3. That we ought to watch the first motions and tendencies of our own hearts to evil—

[The twelve had evidently participated in the feelings of the other Disciples, though not to the same extent. This our Lord saw; and therefore bade them come to a decision. Happy was it for them that the bias of their minds was the right way: and happy for them that they were called upon to decide, before the evil had got too deep a root in their minds. Had they been left to "go back, and walk no more with Jesus," how bitterly would they have lamented it to all eternity! Let us then be aware of the tendency of evil thoughts, and guard against their first introduction into the mind. If we be tempted for a moment to account any thing "a hard saying," or to turn aside in the smallest degree from the path of duty, let us remember, that they who draw back, "draw back unto perdition;" and that "if any man draw back, God's soul shall have no pleasure in him[g]."]

Such was the instructive nature of our Lord's question: and,

II. *The answer* of Peter was worthy of an inspired Apostle—

Peter was forward on all occasions to speak his mind; and often spoke but unadvisedly at best. But on this occasion he returned, both for himself and all his brethren, an answer fraught with wisdom.

Two

[e] One Evangelist mentions only in general terms that "*some*" were thus affected: Mark xiv. 4, 5. Another tells us who they were, even all "*the Disciples*:" Matt. xxvi. 8. And another tells us who was the first instigator, and by what principle he was actuated. John xii. 4—6.

[f] 2 Tim. iv. 16. [g] Heb. x. 38, 39.

Two grounds he states for the determination which all of them had formed to adhere to Christ;

1. The insufficiency of the creature—

[The conviction of his mind on this subject was very strong; insomuch that he ventured even to appeal to Christ himself, and to defy, if I may so speak, omniscience itself to tell him, where any other refuge could be found, or any other source of solid good: "Lord, to whom shall we go?" We are in pursuit of *instruction:* who can give it us, if we turn our back on thee? We are in pursuit of *happiness:* where can we find it, but in thee? We are bent upon the attainment of *heaven:* who can bring us thither, but thyself? If we go back to the world and cast off all care for these things, nothing but everlasting destruction awaits us: and if we go to the Scribes and Pharisees, we have had evidence enough what kind of teachers they are, "blind leaders of the blind." To whom then can we go, with the smallest prospect of attaining what we are seeking after?"

Now this part of Peter's answer furnishes us with a good reply to all who would turn us from the Lord. "To whom, or what, would you turn me?—to the world? I have found its emptiness:—to sin? I know its bitterness:—to formality? I have felt its incompetency to satisfy my mind and conscience. My God tells me that "CHRIST is all:" and I am constrained from daily experience to say to him, "Whom have I in heaven but *thee?* and there is none upon earth that I desire besides *thee.*" Whatever advantages were proposed to us as an inducement to turn back from Christ, we should regard the proposal as absurd and impious as that which was made by the Israelites of old[h].]

2. The all-sufficiency of Christ—

[Our Lord had frequently asserted in the foregoing discourse, that "he would give eternal life to those who should eat his flesh and drink his blood." Peter, in his answer, refers to that; and professes confidently, in the name of all the other Apostles, that the words of Christ pointed out the only true way to life, and that Christ himself was that very Messiah, who was authorized and commissioned to bestow life: "Thou hast the words of eternal life; and we believe &c."

This was a glorious confession, and an ample reason for the determination they had formed to remain firm in his cause. Whither should they go for water, when they had the fountain near them? "True it was, that at the present it was, in a measure, a fountain sealed;" yet not so sealed, but that it always afforded them an abundant supply for their present necessities;

[h] Numb. xiv. 3, 4.

necessities; and in due time it would be opened to the whole world, and flow unto the ends of the earth. They were persuaded that he would impart to them living water; and that, "if only they drank of the water that he should give them, they should never die." O that every Christian in this day felt the same confident persuasion! In vain would the world, and the flesh, and the devil combine their efforts to destroy him: he would determine with Joshua, that though the whole world should become servants to *them*, "he and his house would serve the Lord[i]."]

APPLICATION—

Who amongst you are disposed to walk with Jesus?

[This may be done *now* in the exercise of faith and prayer, precisely as Enoch and Noah "walked with God" in the days of old. It is every Christian's privilege to do so[k]. Be assured, that, however the world may be offended at Christ, he is an able Instructor, a kind Master, a faithful Friend, and an all-sufficient Saviour ———]

Are there any amongst us that have turned back from him?

[Alas! there are apostates now, as well as in former times. But what has any one gained by departing from Christ? Is he happier than he was when he sat at the Saviour's feet and heard his words? There is but one testimony on this head from all the children of men: "In observing lying vanities, they have forsaken their own mercies[l]"———Think then from whence ye are fallen, and say, "I will return unto my first Husband, for then it was better with me than now[m]"———]

To those who are walking steadily with him,

[We would address those words of the Apostle, "Let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall." If even the Apostles were ready to start aside, who has not need to watch and pray lest he also enter into temptation? Awful is that admonition of our Lord, "Remember Lot's wife." If you would endure unto the end, you must be teachable as little children; and be determined, through God's assistance, to "die with Christ, rather than forsake him."]

[i] Josh. xxiv. 15. [k] 1 John i. 3. [l] Jonah ii. 8.
[m] Hos. ii. 7.

DCCCXI.

CHRIST MAY BE SOUGHT TOO LATE.

John vii. 36. *What manner of saying is this that he said, Ye shall seek me, and shall not find me; and, Where I am, thither ye cannot come?*

FROM the character of our blessed Lord we might well expect, that, in whatever circumstances he should be placed, his words and actions would be such as became an incarnate God. Accordingly we find that he was never discomposed, never disheartened; but that, as well in the prospect of a cruel death as on all other occasions, he preserved a temper unruffled, a patience unsubdued. "The Pharisees had sent officers to take him;" and though the precise hour for his being delivered up into their hands was not yet arrived, it was very near: yet, instead of manifesting the smallest apprehension of his approaching sufferings, he spake of his death as though he had been going a journey; and shewed, that his chief concern was about the judgments that would fall upon his enemies: "Yet a little while am I with you; and then I go unto Him that sent me. Ye shall seek me, but shall not find me; and where I go, thither ye cannot come." This assertion of his appeared quite inexplicable to them. "They said among themselves, Whither will he go, that we shall not find him?" and then, after some unsatisfactory conjectures about his going to preach among the Gentiles, or destroying his own life, they were constrained to acknowledge, that they could not at all comprehend it; "What manner of saying is this that he said?" Indeed, even his own Disciples were as much at a loss about his meaning as his very enemies[a].

It is not our intention to justify their unbelief: for it is evident that they were actuated by a proud captious spirit, and not by a sincere desire after instruction. Yet their words will afford us a fit occasion to shew,

I. The

[a] Compare ver. 35. & viii. 22. with xvi. 16—18.

I. The importance of inquiring into Divine truth in general—

It is certain that there are many expressions in the Scriptures dark and intricate—

[This arises in part from the mysterious nature of Divine truth, which relates to subjects remote from the apprehensions of fallen man — — — It is owing also in part to the metaphorical language in which the doctrines of Revelation are often expressed; for, however certain figures may serve to illustrate the particular doctrine contained in them, they cast a veil over the doctrine, till the truth contained in them is understood — — — — But most of all, it is owing to the disinclination of man to receive the things which are revealed. The mind of fallen man is blinded by pride, and passion, and interest: it has a corrupt bias: it is averse to the things which the Spirit of God requires and reveals: "it hates the light, and will not come to the light, lest its vile propensities should be reproved:" and therefore it accounts "the things of the Spirit foolishness," because it is not able to discern their excellency.]

Nevertheless the things contained in the Scriptures are of infinite importance to us all—

[They relate to the everlasting salvation of the soul: they declare the only way in which a sinner can find acceptance with God: they set forth the person, work, and offices of the Messiah, together with the distinct offices of the Holy Trinity in the work of Redemption. They make known the characters of them that are saved and of them that perish, together with the states to which both the one and the other will be sentenced. In short, "the word that Christ hath spoken to us, the same shall judge us in the last day." Now in comparison of these things, the concerns of time and sense are lighter than the dust upon the balance. Earthly things indeed appear of greater magnitude, because they are nearer to us: but if spiritual truths are brought nigh by faith, they eclipse every other object, as the meridian sun hides by its splendor the feebler radiance of the stars.]

They should therefore be inquired into with all diligence—

[We should not be satisfied with a general acknowledgment of their truth, but should examine into the precise import of them, with a view to ascertain what is the state of our own souls before God. When we hear our Lord affirm so solemnly and so repeatedly, that "unless we be born again we cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven;" should

we

we not pause, and consider, and inquire what is meant by the *new birth*, and whether we have ever experienced the change implied in it? When we read, that "except we eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, there is no life in us," should we not use all possible means to understand it, and to learn whether we are in a state of life or of death? Can we suppose, that, because these assertions are conveyed under metaphorical expressions, they mean nothing; or, that we have no concern with them? Will our ignorance of their import make them void? or will our contempt of them prevent the execution of the Divine judgments agreeably to them? We ought, then, as our Lord enjoins us, to "search the Scriptures," to weigh every expression contained in them, and to seek a conformity to them in the whole of our principles and conduct.]

But, not to dwell any longer on general truths, let us consider,

II. The importance of ascertaining the meaning of "this saying" in particular—

Scarcely any expression so frequently occurs towards the close of our Saviour's Ministry as this; from whence we may be assured, that it deserved the special attention of his followers. Let us then examine its meaning,

1. In reference to *them*—

[Our Lord was speedily to be put to death. His death indeed was voluntary on his part; "No man could take his life from him, but he laid it down of himself:" and therefore he said, "I *go* to Him that sent me." But on their part, it was the effect of murderous rage: for this their iniquity the whole nation were to be abandoned to utter ruin[aa]. Then, says our Lord, "ye will seek me, and shall not find me." He does not mean, that they would cry to *him*, and humble themselves before him; but that they would seek for their Messiah, and long for him to deliver them: and the fact was, that, when those calamities did come upon them, they were so desirous of the Messiah's advent, as willingly to receive any impostor that chose to assume that character. But they had slain the true Messiah, and should look for any other in vain[b].

Besides, the great mass of individuals among them were to be given over to final impenitence; and, when they should come before Christ at the last day, they would desire to find mercy with him: but, as "Esau, having sold his birth-right, desired

[aa] Luke xix. 42—44. [b] ib. xvii. 22.

desired afterwards to inherit the blessing, and was rejected, and could find no place of repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears[c];" so these wicked men would repent too late, and spend eternity in unavailing sorrows.

Whilst our Lord warned them of their impending danger, he taught them to consider their punishment as necessarily connected with their wickedness: "Where I am, thither ye *cannot* come." He does not say, "ye *shall* not;" but, ye "*cannot*" come: for they would be excluded from heaven no less by their utter incapacity to enjoy it, than by the unalterable decree of God. Heaven, if they were admitted to it, would be no heaven to them, whilst they retained their malignant passions, and rejected the salvation offered them in the Gospel.]

2. In reference to ourselves—

[Jesus is yet present with us by the preaching of his Gospel; and he will be withdrawn from us as soon as ever death shall separate us from the means of grace. When "the door of heaven shall be shut, we may stand without, and knock, saying, Lord, open to us:" we may even plead with him, and say, "We have eaten and drank in thy presence, and thou hast taught in our streets:" but it will be too late: he will say to us, "Depart from me, I never knew you:" ye sought me not, nor believed in me, when ye were yet on mercy's ground; and now you must have "judgment without mercy."

But this may be the case whilst yet we are in this lower world. There is an "accepted time, a day of salvation," which we may irretrievably lose. We may "grieve" and "resist the Holy Spirit," till we "quench" his gracious motions, and provoke God to say, "He is joined to idols, let him alone." He may be so offended by our wickedness as to "give us up to a reprobate mind," and to "swear in his wrath that we shall never enter into his rest." He has warned us, that he will do so; that, "if we refuse when he calls, he will laugh at our calamity, and mock when our fear cometh: that we may even seek him early, and shall not find him; because we hated knowledge, and did not choose the fear of the Lord[d]."

Indeed, as long as we continue in an unconverted state, that word is true, "Where I am, thither ye cannot come:" for it is impossible for any one to enjoy heaven, without having attained a meetness for it; or to sit down at the marriage supper of the Lamb in heaven, without that wedding garment in which every acceptable guest is clothed.]

We

[c] Heb. xii. 16, 17.

[d] Prov. i. 21—29. with 2 Cor. vi. 2. and Rom. i. 28.

We may see then "*What manner of saying this is*"—

1. It is an *instructive* saying—

[Many are the valuable lessons which it inculcates. It teaches us, that on the present moment eternity depends ———That our great concern in life is to obtain the knowledge of Christ, and an interest in his favour———That a wilful abuse of our present privileges may provoke God to give us up to final impenitence———and that, if we die before we are "renewed after the Divine image in righteousness and true holiness," we can no more enjoy heaven, than "light can have communion with darkness, or Christ with Belial"———Would to God that we might learn these things so deeply, as to be continually influenced by them! Happy will it be for us, if we "seek the Lord while he *may* be found, and call upon him while he is near."]

2. It is a *comfortable* saying—

[The words of our text are elsewhere addressed to his own more-favoured Disciples[e]. They are, in fact, like the pillar and cloud by which Israel were conducted out of Egypt: they have a luminous aspect towards the people of God, whilst they present a dark side towards his enemies. His own dearest children cannot follow him *now*; but they *shall* follow him *soon*[f]. He is merely "gone to prepare a place for them; and will come soon to take them to himself, that *where he is they may be also*[g]." Moreover, his separation from them at present is only corporeal: for he is still with them, and "they see him," and enjoy the sweetest "fellowship with him[h]:" and in a little time they shall enter into his immediate presence, and "be for ever with the Lord[i]." Well might the Apostle say, "*Comfort* ye one another with these words."

But this saying is peculiarly comfortable in another view; for what our Lord said respecting the unbelieving Jews, the Christian may say respecting all his spiritual enemies: "*Yet a little while I am with you*; and ye may make your assaults upon me: but soon *I* shall *go to my Father*, and be out of your reach: then *ye shall seek me, and shall not find me*; *and where I am, thither ye cannot come.* No, Satan; thou canst no more molest me there: temptation shall harass me no more; sin shall no more defile me; sorrow shall no more cloud my mind or oppress my spirits: *there shall enter nothing that defileth*: I may be exposed to you all a little while longer; but soon I shall embrace uninterrupted *joy and gladness*; *and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.*" Blessed reflection! Who must not long for death, that he may enjoy such happiness as

[e] John xiii. 33. [f] ib. ver. 36. [g] John xiv. 2, 3.
[h] John xiv. 19—22. with 1 John i. 3. [i] 1 Thess. iv. 17, 18.

as this? Who must not add his Amen to that petition of our Lord, "Father, I will that they whom thou hast given me may be with me where I am, that they may behold my glory which thou hast given me?" Yes; let all our hearts say, "Even so, Come, Lord Jesus; come quickly!"]

3. It is a *terrific* saying—

[Whilst we see so many living at their ease, disregarding all the invitations of the Gospel, and dreaming of happiness without an interest in Christ, how distressing is it to think, that in a little time their day of grace will be passed, and that God may either give them up to judicial blindness, or say, "Thou fool, this night shall thy soul be required of thee!" When we tell them of these things, they are ready to reply, "*What manner of saying is this that he hath said?* It is a wild enthusiastic dream that shall never be realized." Ah! would to God it might not be realized! but it will, in spite of all that you can say, or do, to the contrary. If you continue saying to Christ, "*Depart from us;* we desire not the knowledge of thy ways;" he will soon take you at your word, and say, "*Depart from me,* ye cursed, into everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels." Trifle then no more with the opportunities afforded you; but "redeem the time;" and, "whilst the light is yet with you, walk in the light, lest darkness come upon you[k]," and "an impassable gulf be fixed" between you and our ever-adorable Emmanuel.]

[k] John xii. 35, 36.

DCCCXII.

THE WOMAN TAKEN IN ADULTERY DISMISSED.

John viii. 10, 11. *When Jesus had lift up himself, and saw none but the woman, he said unto her, Woman, where are those thine accusers? hath no man condemned thee? She said, No man, Lord. And Jesus said unto her, Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more.*

IT is surprising to see in what a variety of ways the wickedness of the human heart will betray itself: sometimes in the commission of gross iniquity, and sometimes in apparent indignation against it: sometimes in open hostility against Christ, and sometimes in hypocritical professions of regard for him. Who that had seen the zeal of the Scribes and Pharisees against an adulterous woman, would not have thought them

them the purest of the human race? Who that had heard their citations of Moses' law, and their respectful application to Christ as an authorized expositor of that law, would not have supposed that they truly feared God, and desired to perform his holy will? Who would have imagined that the whole was only a murderous plot against the life of Christ? Yet so it was. These accusers had no indignation against the sin of adultery, nor any love to the law of Moses, nor any zeal for the honour of God: they were actuated solely by an inveterate hatred of Christ, and a determination to find, if possible, some occasion againt him, that they might accuse him. Their professed object was, to punish the woman; but their real object was, to lay a snare for his life.

We forbear to notice, that in some old Manuscript copies this short history is not recorded, because there can be no doubt of its authenticity; and the very care with which the early Christians examined the authenticity of every part of Scripture, is a strong proof of the genuineness of the New Testament, as it has been handed down to us.

That which we wish you particularly to observe, is,

I. In what manner Christ *extricated himself*—

The snare laid for him was well contrived—

[The Scribes and Pharisees brought him a woman, who had been taken in the very act of adultery, and was therefore incapable of uttering a word in her own defence. The law of Moses had prescribed that all who were guilty of that crime should be put to death. If the woman were not absolutely married, but only espoused, she was still to be put to death, and that by stoning[a]. Hence, it should seem, the particular death to which adulterers in general were condemned, was that of stoning[b]. But the point which they referred to our Lord's decision, was, Whether they should execute the law, or not. Now there were but four things which our Lord could do: either he might acquit the woman, or condemn her, or dismiss the matter without any attention to it, or refer them to another tribunal; but whichever of these he should do, they would make it a ground of accusation against him: if he should acquit her, they would represent him as an enemy to Moses, and a patron of iniquity: if he should condemn her,

[a] Lev. xx. 10. Deut. xxii. 22—24. [b] Ezek. xvi. 38, 40.

her, they would accuse him to the Romans as resisting the government of Cæsar, and encouraging sedition: if he should dismiss the matter, they would say he shewed no zeal for the honour of God, whom he pretended to call his Father, and had no pretensions to the office of the Messiah, whose first object would be to "make an end of sins, and to bring in everlasting righteousness." If he should refer them to any other tribunal, to whomsoever he referred them, whether to the Roman or Jewish authorities, they would equally find matter of accusation against him; either of sanctioning the usurpation of the Romans on the one hand, or of setting himself against it, on the other: so that, whatsoever he should say or do, they would lower him in the estimation of the people, and open a way for his destruction.]

And how did he escape the snare—

[At first he declined giving any answer at all; but stooped down, and wrote upon the ground. What he wrote, we know not: nor are we told precisely what he meant by that significant action[c]: but his enemies, conceiving that they had gained their point, became more and more urgent for a decisive answer: he therefore addressed himself to their consciences; and as, in the case of idolatry, the law required that the witnesses should be the first in stoning the offender to death, so he bade the person that was without sin among them begin to inflict the punishment of death upon her. He did not by this intend, that under the Gospel dispensation human laws should not be executed by any who were not themselves without sin; but he determined to confound these vile hypocrites, who, under a mask of zeal against sin, were perpetrating the greatest of all sins. To give time for his word to operate on their consciences, he stooped down and wrote again: and behold, these accusers, self-condemned in their own minds, and fearful lest their own secret abominations should be exposed to public view, withdrew as privately as they could; the elder part among them, as being most fearful of exposure, retiring first, and gradually the younger also following their example; so that in a little time not a single accuser was left. What an evidence was here of the power of conscience, when awakened by the Spirit of God, and armed against the sinner by a Divine power! Truly, the blindest must see, the most obdurate must feel, the most impudent must blush, and the most confident be confounded, when once the voice of conscience is distinctly heard: and we cannot but think it a good way of silencing a contentious and subtle

[c] He might intend to intimate, that they should take heed to what was written: or perhaps he wrote the very sentence which he afterwards pronounced.

subtle adversary, to make a direct attack upon his conscience, and to fix his attention upon what has passed within his own bosom.

It is not necessary to suppose that all the accusers had been guilty of the precise sin which they laid to the charge of this woman: there was now enough of their past iniquities presented to their view to produce the desired effect, of constraining them to proclaim their own shame, and to suspend the prosecution which they had so wickedly commenced. Thus was our Lord relieved from every difficulty; and his enemies had "fallen into the pit which they had digged" for him.]

It remains for us now to notice,

II. In what manner he *dismissed the woman*—

We hear of no triumph that he expressed over his disconcerted adversaries: he merely asks where they were; and finding that they had withdrawn, and no longer chose to appear in the quality of accusers, he dismisses the woman,

1. With condescending kindness—

["Woman, hath no man condemned thee? neither do I condemn thee: go thy way:" It is not my office to exercise the power of the civil magistrate; nor is it my wish to denounce the judgments of God against thee. "I came not into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through me might be saved[d]." Go, improve the time that is now unexpectedly allotted thee: be thankful that thou art not now sent into the presence of thy God with all thy sins upon thee: let the "space which is given thee for repentance," be well employed: lose not an hour in seeking forgiveness with thy God. Go to thy chamber, and pour out thy soul before him: and remember, that the mercy which thou art experiencing at my hands in relation to thy body, is an emblem of what I am ready to bestow upon thy soul. "I came into the world to seek and to save that which was lost:" nor shall the vilest of the human race be condemned before me in the great and awful day, provided he penitently confess his sins, and humbly seek acceptance through me: "Though his sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool[e]."]

2. With an authoritative admonition—

[Greatly as our Lord delighted in mercy, he would not so exercise it as to give the least countenance to sin. Whilst therefore he dismisses her, he adds a solemn admonition, "Go, and

[d] John iii. 17. [e] Isai. i. 18. & Prov. xxviii 13.

and sin no more." Think not lightly of thy sins, because I have expressed such tenderness towards thee; neither imagine that they will not be punished hereafter, if thou continuest in the commission of them. The "goodness and long-suffering and forbearance which thou hast experienced, should lead thee to repentance;" and, if they do not, they will aggravate thy condemnation to all eternity. Go therefore, and sin no more. Let a sense of thy past dangers deter thee: let a consideration of the mercies vouchsafed to thee stimulate thine exertions: let the hope of future mercies encourage thee: let the prospect of a future judgment fix thy purpose, and strengthen thy resolution. Above all, commit thyself to God, who alone is "able to keep thee from falling, and to present thee faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy."]

ADDRESS,

1. The self-satisfied and self-applauding Christian—

[Many who are vehement against flagrant transgressors, and many too who profess an outward reverence for Christ, are yet exceeding vile in the sight of the heart-searching God. Before men, perhaps, they appear in a favourable light: but if all that they have thought and done in secret were written on their foreheads, they could not endure the sight of their fellow-creatures, but would retire from society, as these Scribes and Pharisees retired, filled with shame and confusion. Let each one of us examine the records of his own conscience; and recollect all the transactions which have passed from his youth up to the present hour: ah! who amongst us would venture, after such a survey, to justify himself? Know ye, Brethren, that God sees all that has passed, whether ye see it or not: you may have forgotten it; but it is all recorded in the book of his remembrance, and will be exposed by him to the view of the whole assembled universe. Learn then to view yourselves as he views you; and to esteem yourselves as he esteems you: and know, that you never have a just estimate of your own character till you see yourselves to be the chief of sinners. Cast away, I say, your high thoughts of yourselves, and learn to lothe and abhor yourselves in dust and ashes.]

2. The sorrowful and self-condemning Christian—

[You see in the history before us how tender and compassionate the Saviour is. If then conscience have arrested you, and brought you into his presence, remember, that he is rich in mercy, and ready to forgive; and that he will never condemn any but the impenitent and unbelieving[f]———

At the same time, I would affectionately caution you against mistaking

[f] Isai. lv. 7. 1 Tim. i. 15, 16.

mistaking the nature of true repentance. Perhaps conscience has condemned you, and you have felt ashamed and confounded on account of your great iniquities. But if you have gone no further, you are no true penitent. The Scribes and Pharisees advanced thus far; but they sought not mercy at the Saviour's hands: *they went from him,* fearing more the decrease of their reputation, than the loss of their souls. Had they been truly penitent, they would have blessed him who had thus flashed conviction on their minds, and have implored his more effectual power to change and renew their souls. Be not contented then to resemble them; but seek to know all the hidden abominations of your hearts, and to have them washed away in the Redeemer's blood. Be assured that true repentance will lead you to Christ: and, if you do not find this effect from your convictions, you may know infallibly that your sorrow is not of "a godly sort," and that your very repentance needs yet to be repented of.

It is of great importance for you to make these distinctions; because many continue all their days guilty, but not humbled; condemned, but not forgiven.]

3. The Christian who professes to have obtained mercy of the Lord—

[The admonition given to the woman is equally addressed to every true Believer. And here must I suggest a caution against a common, but fatal error. If persons abstain from some particular sins which they have before committed, they are ready to think that they have done all that is required of them. But to turn from gross iniquities is a small matter; and to perform some particular duties is a small matter. Pride and self-complacency may carry us thus far: but the grace of God must carry us much farther. We must lay the axe to the root: we must put away "our *besetting* sin:" we must become "new creatures," and "be renewed *in the spirit of our minds.*" Mark this expression: it conveys a more complete idea of sound conversion than almost any other expression in the whole Sacred Volume: contemplate it: enter into it: beg of God to reveal to you its true import. The bent of your minds was earthly: a directly opposite bent must now be given it; just as a river which recently flowed with rapidity towards the ocean, now flows with equal rapidity towards the fountain head: the tide has turned, and completely changed its course. Thus must it be with you: heavenly things must now have the place in your affections that earthly things once held; and the delight of your soul must be in them, as that of a licentious man is in his pleasures, or an avaricious man in his wealth. To surrender up all your faculties and powers as a living sacrifice to God, is the

the proper fruit of his mercies, and the proper evidence of his grace. Never think then that you have yet attained, but press forward for higher degrees of grace and holiness; and make it your endeavour to "stand perfect and complete in all the will of God."]

DCCCXIII.

CHRIST THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD.

John viii. 12. *Then spake Jesus again unto them, saying, I am the light of the world: he that followeth me, shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.*

IT was customary with our blessed Lord to take occasion from things that were immediately before him to instil Divine knowledge into his hearers. When he was at a well, he spake of himself as a fountain of living water: when mention had been made of the manna which was given to the Israelites in the wilderness, he represented himself as the bread that came down from heaven, that men might eat of it and live for ever: when he was passing through a vineyard, he set himself forth as the true and living Vine, by an union with which all the branches were to bring forth fruit. Thus, it should seem, in the passage before us, being early in the Temple[a], and beholding the sun shining bright upon him, he resumed his discourse which had been interrupted, and spake to all the people, saying, "I am the light of the world."

We cannot but notice in this impressive declaration,

I. The excellency of Christ—

Of all the objects in the visible creation, the sun is the most splendid and majestic: and hence it is the most frequently selected to characterize our blessed Lord. The sun has in itself a fulness of light, and is the one source of light to the material world. In Christ also are "hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge;" and from him alone is derived all spiritual light. It is he that enlightens all,

1. By

[a] ver. 2.

1. By his instructions—

[To form a correct judgment of this subject, we should survey the state of the world before the coming of Christ. The darkness that prevailed is justly styled by the prophet, "*gross* darkness." The most learned philosophers could not absolutely determine whether there were a God; or, if there were, whether there were one or many. They conceived that there were some Beings superior to themselves; and them they called gods: but the characters they assigned to them, were such as would disgrace the lowest of the human race. They felt themselves sinners; but the methods which they devised for expiating their crimes were beyond measure absurd. They could not account for the sin and misery which they both saw and felt, nor could they prescribe any remedy for these disorders. "They were vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened: professing themselves to be wise, they shewed themselves to be very fools[b]." But "the Day-spring from on high," the Lord Jesus Christ, "has visited us, to give light to them that sat in darkness and the shadow of death[c]." He has declared to us fully the nature and perfections of God—the means of reconciliation with him—the duties we owe to him and to each other—and whatever else can conduce to the regulating of our lives or the furthering of our happiness.]

2. By his example—

[Had precepts alone been given us, we should have been ready to construe them in such a way, as would best suit with our carnal prejudices and sensual inclinations. But by exhibiting in his own life a perfect pattern of holiness, he has cut off all occasion for doubt respecting the nature or extent of our duty. We need only to walk as he walked, and we cannot err. Do we desire to ascertain what that service is, which we owe to God? we see in him, that we should have the whole law of God written in our hearts; and that it should be "our meat and our drink to do his will." Do we wish to know how we should conduct ourselves towards our fellow-creatures? We have an unerring rule set before us, in his unruffled meekness, his inexhausted patience, his unbounded love: in laying down his life for his enemies, he has shewn us what we are to do, at least for the Brethren, if not also even for our bitterest persecutors. In short, we can be in no situation whatever, wherein his example will not serve as a light to our feet and a lantern to our paths: if it do not shew us the precise *act* we are to perform, it will shew us infallibly the *spirit* we are to exercise.]

3. By his influence—

[The

[b] Rom. i. 21, 22. [c] Luke i. 78, 79.

[The sun is of use to those only who have eyes to see it. But Jesus, at the same time that he imparts light, bestows upon us also the organs of vision whereby we may behold it. He "opens the eyes of our understanding;" and "shines into our hearts, to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God." He not only causes "the day to dawn," but is also "the Day-star arising in our hearts[d]." He gives the spiritual discernment whereby alone we can discern the things of the Spirit, however clearly they were before revealed. Indeed, our reason is nothing more than a taper which he has lighted up in our minds: and much more is the faculty of comprehending the deep things of God, derived from him: so that that inspired testimony concerning him is strictly true, "He is the true light which lighteth every man that cometh into the world[e]."]

From hence we are naturally led to consider,

II. The blessedness of his followers—

We regard with pity the inhabitants of the polar regions, who for half the year are statedly secluded from the cheering rays of the sun. We consider our quicker returns of light and darkness as incomparably more conducive to comfort and prosperity. But infinitely happier is he on whom the Sun of righteousness has once arisen: for,

1. He shall not walk in darkness—

[Once he was guided altogether by *erroneous principles*. So blind was he, that he "put evil for good, and good for evil; darkness for light, and light for darkness." Nor is this the case only with the ignorant and profane: it is equally true of those whose minds are cultivated, and whose lives are moral. Even Paul before his conversion, fraught as he was with the knowledge of the Scriptures, and zealous in the pursuit of righteousness, perpetrated the most horrible acts of wickedness under the idea of doing God service: "he verily thought with himself that he ought to do the things which he did." But the follower of Christ, the true Believer[f], is not suffered to live under the influence of such delusions: his views are rectified: he beholds things in the light in which they are represented in the Scriptures; he has learned from them what is the good and acceptable and perfect will of God, and has his mind cast, as it were, into the very mould of the Gospel.

Once too he indulged himself in *corrupt habits:* whether more or less addicted to gross sin, he loved the ways of the world, and conformed himself to them: all his delight was in the

[d] 2 Pet. i. 19. [e] John i. 9. [f] Compare John xii 46. with the text.

the things of time and sense: he lived as if he had nothing else to do, but to consult his reputation, ease, and interests in the world. But, having obtained mercy of the Lord, he now discerns the evil of such a life: he begins to see, that "to be thus carnally-minded is death;" and that there are objects infinitely nobler than those he has regarded, and more deserving his attention. Convinced of this, he "will not live any longer to the lusts of men, but to the will of God." Instead of "fulfilling any longer the desires of the flesh and of the mind," he strives henceforth to mortify them, and labours to "perfect holiness in the fear of God."

We must add yet again, that he once walked in the darkness of *distressing apprehensions*. God has said, and experience proves, that "there is no peace to the wicked." Every man in his unregenerate state is in bondage to the fear of death, and more or less under the terrors of a guilty conscience. The thoughts of death and judgment are painful to him; and he puts them far from him: he flees to business, to pleasure, to company, in order to dissipate those reflections which he cannot wholly avoid. He has an inward consciousness that he has not sought the Divine favour, and, in consequence of that, a secret fear that he shall not obtain it. From such feelings as these, the Believer in Christ is happily delivered. "He knows in whom he has believed, and that his adorable Saviour is able to keep that which he has committed to him." He has learned to reckon death among the number of his friends, and to regard it as the door of entrance into his Father's presence. Instead of being harassed with a "fearful looking-for of judgment and fiery indignation," he enjoys "that peace of God which passeth all understanding."]

2. He shall have the light of life—

[There is a light which *proceeds from* life, and *leads to* life; and that light is his blessed portion. A dead man has no light at all: but a living man has senses given him, on purpose to guard him from things destructive, and to lead him to things conducive to his welfare. The sight, the hearing, the smell, the taste, the touch, have all their appropriate uses; and each has its peculiar office, in circumstances where the others can find no scope for exercise. They are so many sentinels, that guard every avenue of ill, and that give warning on the first approach of evil. Thus protected is the follower of Christ: he has spiritual senses, which, being of quick perception to discern good and evil, give early notice of the things which might prove fatal to the soul. They serve as "a light to his feet, and a lantern to his paths." Solomon justly observes, that "the spirit of man is the candle of the

Lord, searching all the inward parts of the belly[g]." This candle being duly trimmed, his way is made plain before his face; and he is enabled to walk without stumbling: "He walks in the light, as God is in the light;" and thus maintains sweet fellowship with God, and a sense of his pardoning love in Christ Jesus[h]. If at any time, through temptation or distress, this light burn dim, he cries to his Lord and Saviour, who has promised to send him fresh supplies of *his* Spirit; and speedily does "light arise to him in his obscurity, and his darkness becomes as the noon-day[i]." Thus guided through his whole life, he arrives at last at those blessed regions; "whereof the Lamb is the light[k]," and where "his Lord shall be an everlasting light, and his God his glory[l]."]

APPLICATION—

[You can easily conceive the difference both in the feelings and the safety of one that walks in midnight darkness, and of one that travels in the light of the noon-day sun. O that all would make a just application of this thought to their own case, and resolve without delay to become followers of Christ[m]!]

[g] Prov. xx. 27. [h] 1 John i. 7. [i] Isai. lviii. 10.
[k] Rev. xxi. 23. [l] Isai. lx. 19.
[m] John xii. 35, 36. Jer. xiii. 16.

DCCCXIV.

LOVE TO CHRIST A TEST OF OUR RELATION TO GOD.

John viii. 42. *Jesus said unto them, If God were your Father, ye would love me.*

IF experience did not convince us, we could scarcely believe that presumption should be so rooted in the heart of man as we find it is. That it should exist, not only without any grounds, but in opposition to the strongest possible evidence, and be held fast with a pertinacity which nothing can shake, is truly surprising. Yet so it is: men believe that God is their Father, though not one feature of his image is found upon them, and their resemblance to Satan is complete. The Jews accounted themselves children of God merely because of their carnal descent from Abraham, his friend: and when our Lord endeavoured to shew them, from their works, that they

they could have no spiritual relation either to Abraham or to God, they could not so much as understand his words; so strange and incomprehensible did his distinctions appear. But, as he had just before shewn them that their works disproved their relation to Abraham, so now he appeals to their works as undeniable evidences that they were not children of God; "If God were your Father, ye would love me."

In discoursing on these words, we shall,

I. Consider the test here proposed—

Our Lord is proving that his obstinate opponents neither were, nor could be, children of God: and he gives them a test whereby they may try themselves. Now this test was the most easy, and most certain, that could be imagined: for if they were children of God,

1. They would *have in themselves* a disposition to love—

[God is love; and all his children bear his image, especially in this particular. However vile they may have been in their unregenerate state, "living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another," by regeneration their evil dispositions are mortified, and a spirit of humility and love becomes the governing principle of their souls. This change is universal: it is the leading feature by which every Child of God is known. The want of it, whatever else we may possess, infallibly proves us children of the wicked one. "Though we should know all the mysteries of our holy religion, and have a faith that can remove mountains, and give all our goods to feed the poor, and even give our bodies to be burnt for Christ, if we had not the principle of love in our hearts, we should be only as sounding brass and tinkling cymbals."]

2. They would *find in Christ* whatever was suited to conciliate their regard—

[This our Lord particularly specifies. He had "proceeded and come forth from God," in a way in which no creature ever had[a]. He was the Messenger of the Lord of Hosts: he had not come of his own mind, like the false prophets, but was sent from God; as his credentials abundantly testified. Nor was he doing his own will, but the will of Him that sent him:

[a] The terms here used, being never used in reference to any other person, are supposed to denote his eternal generation. But though there is ground for the remark, we would not lay much stress upon it.

him: nor did he seek his own glory, but the glory of Him that sent him. Seeing then that he was the Father's Messenger to them; that he was come not only to reveal the way of salvation to them, but to obtain salvation for them, by bearing their sins in his own body on the tree; seeing that in the prosecution of this work he had displayed such unerring wisdom, such indefatigable diligence, such invincible patience, such almighty power, and such unbounded love; could they do otherwise than love him, if they were children of God? Could they be blind to so much excellence, and insensible of so much kindness, if God were their Father? Impossible. It could not be that God should leave his own children so much under the power of the devil, as to reject the mercy he had prepared for them, and destroy the Messenger whom he had sent to redeem them.]

That we may see more clearly the suitableness of this test, we will,

II. Compare it with other tests which men devise for themselves—

Every man has some ground on which he builds his hopes, and some test whereby he tries his title to heaven. This test varies according to the attainments which each person has made, or thinks he has made, in religion; every one fixing his own standard, and so drawing the line as to include himself within the number of God's elect. They are children of God, because,

1. They have committed no gross sin—

[Be it so: they have kept within the bounds which the world prescribes for our moral and religious conduct: but is this sufficient to prove them children of God? Yea rather, does not the complacency which they feel in consequence of this partial obedience prove them indisputably to be children of the devil? What is, in fact, the language of their hearts? Is it not *this?* 'It is needless to love and serve God: to obey his law is quite superfluous: all that we need to do, is, to abstain from gross sin: if we do that, we need not alarm ourselves about the displeasure of God: we are in no danger of perishing: we need not trouble ourselves about a Saviour: we have all the righteousness that God requires, and may look forward with confidence to our final acceptance with him.' Yes, this, I say, is the language of their hearts: and I leave you to judge how far such a state of mind can be an evidence of their being children of God. In truth, all the gross sins that they could possibly commit would not more clearly

clearly prove them children of the devil, than this impiety: the weight and number of their sins indeed might be increased; but, as a test, nothing can be more decisive of their state, than such vain confidence as this.]

2. They approve of the doctrines of the Gospel—

[It matters little what doctrines we embrace, unless they operate to the renovation of our souls. Our Lord intimates that many will express a considerable degree of zeal in his cause, preaching his Gospel, and casting out devils in his name, who yet will be rejected by him at last, because they did not experience any sanctifying efficacy from his Gospel: "their saying, Lord, Lord, will not avail them any thing, because they did not the will of his heavenly Father." Indeed a knowledge of the Gospel tends rather to aggravate the guilt of those who do not practically embrace it; because they sin against greater light, and against the convictions of their own conscience. The Jews were filled with zeal for the law of Moses, and were ready to put our Lord to death for supposed violations of it: but were they therefore children of God? No: though they pretended such high respect for the law, they did not themselves keep the law, as our Lord told them; and that very law would condemn them in the last day. It is plain therefore that an assent to any system of Divine truth can never be an adequate test of our relation to God.]

3. They have experienced a change both in their views and conduct—

[This comes to nearly the same point as the two preceding: for the circumstance of our having formerly been more erroneous in our views, or more vicious in our conduct, can never make us right, if we stop short of that change which God requires. It is true that a reformation of our life seems to manifest the operation of Divine grace, and in that view to sanction a confidence that we are children of God: but Herod still continued a child of the devil, notwithstanding, in compliance with John's admonitions, "he did many things." The stony-ground hearers are represented as experiencing a great and joyful change; and the thorny-ground hearers even bring forth fruit, and continue to do so to their dying hour; yet neither the one nor the other are acknowledged by God as his children, because they "bring not forth fruit unto perfection."]

4. But view, in opposition to all these tests, the one which our Lord proposed to the Jews—

[That is perfect and complete; and will decide the point beyond all possibility of mistake. Let it only be clearly ascertained that we love Christ, and our relation to God will be unquestionable: for though it may be said, that the love

of

of Christ is not of itself a performance of all our duty; yet it must be said, on the other hand, that it is a principle which will yield to universal obedience: nor is it possible to have a true love to Christ in our hearts without loving, and longing to fulfil, the whole will of God. Whilst therefore the tests which men adopt for themselves are universally defective and fallacious, this is perfectly adequate to the end proposed: for no man can be a Child of God who cannot abide that test; nor can any man be a child of Satan, if the love of Christ be found in his heart.]

Let us then proceed to,

III. Try ourselves by it—

The inquiry is simple: Do we love,

1. His person?

["To them that believe, he is precious;" "fairer than ten thousand, and altogether lovely." Is he so to us? Have "we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only-begotten of the Father?" Have we seen him to be "the brightness of his Father's glory, and the express image of his person?" Have we seen concentered in him all divine and human excellence, so as to be constrained to say, "Who is like unto Thee?" And do we "account all things but dung for the excellency of the knowledge of him?" If we love him aright, our love to him must infinitely exceed all creature-attachment: life itself must have lost its value, in comparison of his will and his glory. To say, "My beloved is mine, and I am his," must be the summit of our ambition, more in our estimation than ten thousand worlds. Inquire then whether this be indeed the habit of your minds? The splendor of the sun eclipses the feebler radiance of the stars: and in like manner will the glory of the Sun of righteousness, if it be indeed beheld by us, cause all sublunary glory to vanish from before our eyes.]

2. His ways?

["He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me," saith our Lord himself. We know how strongly even creature-affection will operate to make us consult the wishes, and perform the will, of the object beloved: and the love of Christ will assuredly operate in the same manner: it will "constrain us to live, not to ourselves, but unto Him who died for us and rose again." His commandments, whatever self-denial they may require, will never appear grievous; but we shall account his service to be perfect freedom. In proportion as "God enlarges our hearts," it will be our delight to "*run* the way of his commandments." How is it then with us in this respect? Are we panting after higher degrees of holiness, and labouring with augmented diligence

diligence to do whatsoever will be pleasing in his sight? Are we "forgetting what is behind, and reaching forward to that which is before," accounting nothing attained whilst any thing remains to be attained, and longing to "stand perfect and complete in all the will of God?" *This, this* is the fruit of love: and if we say that we love Christ whilst we are strangers to this frame, "we are liars, and the truth is not in us[b]."]

3. His salvation?

[It cannot fail but that, if we love Christ, we must love that glorious plan of salvation which he has revealed to us, "and glory above all things in the cross of Christ:" there will appear a suitableness in it, a perfect correspondence with all our wants and necessities. The atonement which Christ has offered for us will be regarded with wonder and admiration, as the most mysterious fruit of divine wisdom, and the most stupendous effort of divine love. The opening made by it for the harmonious exercise and united display of all the divine perfections will fill the soul with rapture, and constrain it to vie with all the hosts of heaven in singing, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain, to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing: therefore blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever."]

4. His glory?

[We shall not be indifferent to this, if we love him in truth: we shall wish that his name may be known, his salvation enjoyed, and his glory be exalted, throughout all the earth. As those who preceded his advent longed for his appearance upon earth, so shall we long for his fuller manifestation to the world, that heaven itself may be brought down to earth, and all the kingdoms of the world be his undivided empire. It will grieve us to see that any of the human race are ignorant of him, and that he is dishonoured by so many of those who enjoy the light of his Gospel: and we shall be praying from our inmost souls, "Thy kingdom come; thy will be done in earth as it is in heaven." If we can do any thing for the conversion of Jews or Gentiles, we shall gladly exert ourselves to the utmost; if by any means we may be the honoured instruments of extending his dominion, even though it should be only over the soul of one single individual.

What now does conscience say to these things? Have we indeed the love of Christ in us; and does it extend thus to every thing relating to him, his person, his ways, his salvation, his glory?]

ADDRESS,

[b] 1 John ii. 4.

ADDRESS,

1. To those who can stand this test—

[Happy indeed are ye, who, when Christ puts the question to you, "Lovest thou me?" can answer, "Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee." Ye assuredly are children of God; and, "if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ"———Yet remember, that your evidence of this relation exists only in proportion as the love of Christ *reigns* in your souls. If any sin whatever *have dominion* over you, your evidence is destroyed, or rather, it is evident you are *not* the Lord's. This is so strongly asserted by God himself, that we would wish you never for one moment to lose sight of it, lest your presumption be like that of the Jews, and issue, like theirs, in everlasting ruin[c].]

2. To those who are condemned by it—

[These, alas! are the great majority of the Christian world. If the love of *self*, or the love of *the world*, had been the test of our relation to God, then would he have had many children amongst us, whose evidence would be clear, and their claim indisputable. But we must stand or fall by another test, even by that proposed by our Lord himself[d]. See then what ye have to do. You have not to fulfil the whole law in order to become children of God; (*that* were indeed a hopeless case:) but to get the love of Christ in your hearts. And can you feel any backwardness to that? Methinks, the difficulty should be to refrain from loving him. Only think who he is; and what he has done and suffered for you: think what excellencies unite in him, and how great will be the comfort of loving him: think how willing he is to reconcile you to God, and to bring you into the family of heaven. Only believe in him, love him, and give yourselves to him; and all shall yet be well with you, both in time and eternity.]

[c] 1 John iii. 6—10. [d] Compare 1 Cor. xvi. 22.

DCCCXV.

ABRAHAM'S VIEWS OF CHRIST.

John viii. 56. *Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day; and he saw it, and was glad.*

ONE cannot read any of our Lord's discourses without seeing the need of a spiritual discernment. For want of it, his hearers could not understand his plainest assertions. It being his object to convey spiritual

spiritual instruction, he used such expressions as were suited to that end: but his hearers affixed only a carnal sense to them, and therefore conceived of him as talking like a maniac; "Thou hast a devil, and art mad." One expression in particular gave them the highest offence: he had said, "If a man keep my saying, he shall never taste of death:" this they interpreted as relating to the death of the body; and, well knowing that Abraham and the Prophets had all died, they could not endure such arrogance as that assertion implied; since it, in fact, exalted *him* above Abraham himself. Though they misconstrued his meaning, our Lord would not deny the inference which they drew from his words; but, on the contrary, confirmed it; and told them, that, contemptible as they thought him, Abraham himself had "eagerly desired to see his day[a]," and, on being favoured with a sight of it, "had greatly rejoiced." At this they stumbled still more: and, on being further assured by him, that he existed before Abraham was born, they took up stones to stone him.

In the assertion before us, however ridiculous it appeared to their carnal apprehensions, is contained a most important truth: to illustrate which, we shall shew,

I. What were Abraham's views of Christ—

To mark this with precision is no easy matter. If we suppose that Abraham understood the types as we do, his views of Christ were complete indeed: for, from the appearance of Jehovah to him in human shape[b], he would behold *the incarnation of Christ*: and from Melchizedec, to whom Abraham himself offered tithes of all that he possessed, and from whom also he received a blessing[c], he would know *the everlasting priesthood of Christ*, and the necessity of depending on him for all spiritual blessings. Moreover, from his being ordered to offer Isaac upon an altar

[a] This must be the sense of ἠγαλλιάσατο in this place; else there would be a manifest tautology.

[b] Gen. xviii. 2, 22, 25, 27, 30. [c] Gen. xiv. 17—20.

altar on Mount Moriah, (the very place where Christ was afterwards crucified;) and from Isaac being restored to him, when in Abraham's purpose he was already dead; he would learn *the sacrifice of Christ* by *the hand*, as it were, *of his own Father* [d], and *his resurrection from the dead.* And as he is said to have made this offering "by faith," and to have "received his son from the dead *in a figure*," we are by no means certain that he did not see the mystery contained in that remarkable transaction [e]. But we wish always to lean to the safe side in our interpretations of Holy Writ, and rather to assert too little than too much: we therefore content ourselves with ascribing to Abraham such views only as the New-Testament Writers have clearly assigned to him. He saw then,

1. The person and work of Christ as a Saviour—

[He saw that there was some particular person who should spring from him, distinct from, and superior to, all his other descendants [f]. He saw that the covenant which God had condescended to make with him was confirmed and ratified in that particular individual [g]. He saw that that person was to be a source of blessings to mankind; and *that*, not to one nation only, but to all the nations of the earth. He saw, that though the land of Canaan was promised to him and his posterity, this was not the only, or the chief, blessing which they were to inherit: on the contrary, he regarded Canaan only as a type of a better inheritance [h]; and saw distinctly, that grace and glory were the special benefits which the promised Seed should obtain for them [i]. Whether he knew precisely *in what manner* Christ was to obtain these things for us, we do not undertake to determine; but that Christ was to be the one fountain of these blessings to the world, he knew assuredly; for on that very truth he grounded all his hopes of salvation.]

2. The method of a sinner's justification through him—

[We are continually told, "that Abraham's faith was counted to him for righteousness." But was it *the act* of faith that constituted his justifying righteousness before God? If so, "he has whereof to glory;" (in direct opposition to St. Paul's

[d] Isai. liii. 10. [e] See Heb. xi. 17—19. [f] Gal. iii. 16.
[g] Gal. iii. 17. [h] Heb. xi. 9, 10, 13—16.
[i] Luke i. 68—75. Compare with Gal. iii. 14, 18.

Paul's assertion;) and he was saved by works, and not by faith only[k]: (for faith, *as an act of our own*, is a work, as much as love, or any other act.) No: it was by *the object* of faith that he was justified, even by that promised Seed, who died for him upon the cross: and it was to that promised Seed that he looked for a justifying righteousness before God[l].

It may be said, in opposition to this, that St. James says he was justified by works, and particularly by offering up his son Isaac upon the altar[m]. But a very little consideration will suffice to shew, that he does not contradict the assertions of St. Paul. *When* was Abraham justified? I answer, the very moment he believed the declaration of God with respect to the promised Seed[n]. But this was long before any of those acts of obedience for which we might suppose him to have been justified: it was no less than twenty-four years before he was circumcised[o]: and consequently, forty, if not fifty, years, before that act of obedience which St. James refers to[p]. This indisputably proves, that the offering up of Isaac was not *the ground* of his justification before God; but that it was only *an evidence* of the truth and sincerity of that faith whereby he was justified. The righteousness of Christ was that by which he was justified; his *faith* was only *the means* of his justification; and *his works* were *the evidence* of his justification: *by faith* he apprehended Christ; and by offering up his son (*from whom Christ was to spring*), he shewed the reality and strength of his faith.

This great truth, that we are justified by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, is the one grand point in which the whole Gospel centers: and this point Abraham saw, not only in reference to himself, but in reference also to the whole world; as well those who should not derive their natural descent from him, as those who should[q]. Other things he might see more or less distinctly; but this he saw as clearly as we ourselves can do; yea, happy would it be for many, if they saw it half so clearly as he did[r].]

From knowing what his views of Christ were, we shall be at no loss to say,

II. Why he so exulted in them—

Though we should estimate his knowledge by the lowest standard, the event which he foresaw could not fail of being a source of much joy to him,

1. Because

[k] Rom. iv. 1—5. [l] Rom. iii. 21—26. & v. 18.
[m] Jam. ii. 21—23. [n] Gen. xii. 1—3. & xv. 5, 6.
[o] Comp. Gen. xii. 4. with xvii. 1, 24. & Rom. iv. 9—12.
[p] Gen. xxii. 1. [q] Gal. iii. 8, 9. [r] Rom. iv. 18—22.

1. Because of the mystery contained in it—

[Frequently does St. Paul characterize the Gospel as a "mystery that from eternity was hid in the bosom of God," and as containing "all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge[rr]." Another Apostle represents the very "angels in heaven as desiring to look into it," and to search out, if possible, its immeasurable extent[s].

Do we wonder then that Abraham rejoiced in the manifestation of this to his soul? To see such a display of the Divine perfections, all exhibited in the person of one who should spring from his loins; to see a descendant of his own effecting what all the angels in heaven would in vain have endeavoured to effect; to see him, by his own obedience unto death, bringing more honour to God than all the obedience of angels ever brought, and more good to man than he would have enjoyed if he had never sinned at all; I say, to see such "a day" as this, might well fill him with all the rapture that feeble mortality could sustain. When this mystery began to be more fully manifested in the incarnation of Christ, a multitude of the heavenly host, astonished, as it were, at the display of the Divine glory, commenced a new song, saying, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good-will towards men." And from that period it has been the one theme of praise and adoration among saints on earth and saints in heaven. Yea, so glorious, so inexhaustible is the subject, that after millions of years it will be as new and interesting as ever: and to all eternity, notwithstanding it will be progressively unfolded to the admiring universe, it will be found to have a length and breadth, a depth and height, that can never be explored.]

2. Because of the benefits conveyed by it—

[If he had only his own personal benefit in view, he could not but rejoice: for, what an amazing benefit is it for a guilty creature to say, "Behold, God is my salvation: I will trust, and not be afraid; for the Lord Jehovah is my strength and my song, he also is become my salvation[ss]!" It is not possible for any one to have this sweet assurance, and not adopt the language of exultation predicted to be used[t], or that actually used by the Church of old, "I will greatly rejoice in the Lord; my soul shall be joyful in my God: for he hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decketh himself with ornaments, and as a bride adorneth herself with her jewels[u]." Indeed it is said of every Believer, that

[rr] Col. ii. 3. [s] 1 Pet. i. 10—12. [ss] Isai. xii. 2.
[t] Isai. xxv. 9. [u] Isai. lxi. 10.

that "though he has not personally seen Christ, yet he cannot but rejoice in him with joy unspeakable and full of glory[x]." But doubtless he looked to the salvation of a ruined world: and what joy must not that excite! See in what raptures David was, at the prospect which was opened to him[y]! See how, at the period of our Saviour's advent, every heart rejoiced! how Mary exclaimed, "My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour!" how the embryo infant, of six months' existence only in the womb of Elizabeth, leaped for joy at the approach of the blessed Virgin, in whom the Saviour was but just formed[z]! Hear, at the time of his nativity, with what extatic joy the angels proclaimed his advent, "Behold, I bring you glad tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people; for unto you is born this day, in the city of David, a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord[a]!" Hear how every person, to whose ears it was at all welcome, exulted in it! how Zacharias "blessed God;" and Simeon desired his dismission from the body, accounting that he had attained all that was valuable in life, now that he had seen and embraced the infant Saviour[b]! Behold, when salvation by Christ was proclaimed on the day of Pentecost, how all the converts forgot every personal concern, and spent all their time in blessing and praising God[c]! So it was, wherever the glad tidings were proclaimed[d]. No wonder then it was so with Abraham, when he heard, as it were, an universal *Jubilee* proclaimed: his heart at least, if not his lips, gave vent to its feelings, in the expressive language of the prophet, "Sing, O ye heavens, for the Lord hath done it: shout, ye lower parts of the earth; break forth into singing, ye mountains, O forest, and every tree therein; for the Lord hath redeemed Jacob, and glorified himself in Israel[e]."]

We cannot conclude without INQUIRING, *What effect has the arrival of this day on you?*

[How many who live under the meridian light of the Gospel have never yet attained the knowledge nor the joy that Abraham possessed, though he lived two thousand years before the Lord Jesus came into the world! The greater part of those who bear the Christian name never think of commemorating the Saviour's advent, except in the way of carnal feasting: and make his being "manifested to take away our sins" an occasion of multiplying their transgressions against him. But woe be to those who so mock and insult the Saviour of the world: truly their mirth will have a very different issue from what they expect. I call upon you

[x] 1 Pet. i. 8, 9. [y] Ps. xcviii. Read, and quote, the whole psalm.
[z] Luke i. 44. [a] Luke ii. 10, 11. [b] ib. ver. 27—32.
[c] Acts ii. 44—47. [d] Acts viii. 8, 39. [e] Isai. xliv. 23.

you then to examine, what effect the contemplation of this mystery has produced on you? Has it filled you with admiration, and gratitude, and joy? and does this effect of it remain upon your mind from day to day? Be not satisfied, if this be not your experience: be assured, you know nothing of the Saviour's love, nothing, at least, as you ought to know it, if it have not produced this effect upon you. If you be Abraham's children, you will "walk in the steps of your father Abraham," believing in Christ, and rejoicing in him; not indeed in the prospect of his advent in the flesh, but in the prospect of that day, when "he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and admired in all them that believe."]

DCCCXVI.

SECURITY OF CHRIST'S SHEEP.

John x. 27, 28. *My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: and I give unto them eternal life: and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand.*

WHILST we acknowledge with gratitude the powers of reason in investigations of a speculative or temporal nature, we must be very jealous of its conclusions in matters that are purely spiritual or practical. In whatever relates to God and to the soul, its decisions are apt to be biassed by prejudice, or interest, or passion; and it yields or withholds assent, not so much according to the weight of evidence adduced, as according to the dispositions which are called forth into exercise. This was peculiarly manifest amongst the persons who attended on the ministry of our Lord: some were so wrought upon by the greatness of his miracles, and the impressive wisdom of his discourses, that they could not but receive him as the Messiah; whilst others were always complaining of want of evidence, and always cavilling at his words. In the preceding context we are told, that "the Jews came round about him, and said, How long dost thou make us to doubt? if thou be the Christ, tell us plainly. Jesus answered them, I told you; and ye believed not." He then informs them what the source was of their unbelief; "Ye believe not, because

because ye are not of my sheep:" you are destitute of those gracious qualities which would have fitted you for receiving my word: had you been given to me by the Father, and possessed the dispositions which characterize my sheep, you would have both believed in me, and reaped all the benefits of that faith: "My sheep hear my voice; and I know them, and they follow me, &c."

In these words our Lord refers to a conversation which he had recently had with them respecting his sheep; and goes on to declare,

I. Their character—

This is delineated with great simplicity:

1. They hear his voice—

[Sheep that are well attended, are always observant of the shepherd's voice: so is the Christian also of the voice of Christ. Christ speaks to us in his word as truly as ever he spake to his Disciples in the days of his flesh: and it is the delight of all his people to hear and obey his word. The Inspired Volume is to them a source, an inexhaustible source, of comfort: they read it, they meditate upon it, they pray over it, they "esteem it more than their necessary food." When they open it, they look up to their divine Master, and say, "Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth;" "Open thou mine eyes, that I may see wondrous things out of thy law." Directions, warnings, invitations, promises, all are alike acceptable to them: every thing that conveys to them the mind and will of their good Shepherd, is received with implicit faith, and unreserved obedience.]

2. They follow his steps—

[In the written word they behold the path their Saviour trod; and wherever they see the traces of his feet, they endeavour to follow. They inquire not whether the way be arduous and self-denying, or perilous and beset with enemies; all that they desire is, to ascertain precisely the path of duty; and then to walk in it with steadiness and perseverance. They plainly see that their Shepherd is gone before them towards Zion, regardless of all dangers, indifferent to all the things of this world, and intent only on executing the will of his heavenly Father; and thither they direct their steps, cultivating in every thing "the mind that was in him," and endeavouring "to walk as he walked."]

In proportion as they pursue this path, they augment,

II. Their

II. Their happiness—

The Lord Jesus Christ regards them with approbation—

[It is true that he "knows them" all by name; nay more, he knows every thing relating to them, their wants, their weaknesses, their fears, their trials, their exertions, their desires. But the word in our text is intended to express the approbation with which their Shepherd notices their well-meant endeavours[a]. And what can afford them greater happiness than the enjoyment of his favour? "In his favour is life; and his loving-kindness is better than life itself." Is it asked, How he conveys to them a sense of his favour? I answer, by "the witness of his Spirit," by "the testimony of their own conscience," by "shedding abroad his love in their hearts through the Holy Ghost." It is a certain truth, that "he will manifest himself to them as he does not unto the world:" and he "will give them the white stone, wherein is a new name written, which no man knoweth, saving he that receiveth it[b]." In this sense of his love, they have a "peace that passeth all understanding," and "a joy with which the stranger intermeddleth not."]

He loads them with his richest benefits—

[Whatever he bestows upon them in this world, it is but a taste before the banquet, a drop before the shower, a pledge and earnest of infinitely richer blessings in the world to come. "He gives unto them eternal life:" he has prepared other pastures for them in heaven, where all his sheep from the commencement to the end of time shall be collected, and form "one fold under one Shepherd." If their "joys" even *here* are sometimes "unspeakable," who shall declare the happiness reserved for them against *that* day? Never for a moment will they lose sight of their Beloved: they will hear his voice day and night: they will follow him incessantly without any weariness or difficulty: the richest images that can be borrowed from earthly things are incapable of conveying the smallest idea of the felicity that awaits them. And all this is *given* them; it is given them *freely;* it is given them *now:* it is said in our text, not, "I *will* give them," but, "I *give* them:" the very moment that they are brought home to his fold, he bestows it on them: they have instantly a right and title to it; and when they go hence, they go and take possession of it, not as a new gift which shall then be conferred, but as an inheritance, which by the surest of all titles, they have before been enabled to call their own.]

Their ultimate possession of these benefits is insured

[a] See Ps. i. 6. & 1 Cor. viii. 3. [b] Rev. ii. 17.

insured to them in such a manner, as warrants us to affirm and to rejoice in,

III. Their security—

Nothing shall be permitted to rob them of their inheritance—

[Sheep may perish either from internal disorders, or from outward enemies: and it should seem that the sheep of Christ also may fail of attaining eternal blessedness either through the corruptions of their own hearts, or through the assaults of their spiritual enemies. But against both these dangers their Shepherd has engaged to protect them: "they shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of his hand." It is here taken for granted, that they are exposed to things, which, without the intervention of Omnipotence to prevent it, might terminate in their destruction: and every one of them feels, that this is really the case. But Jesus guarantees, if I may so say, their safety: he has himself begun the good work in them, and he undertakes to perfect it: he "has laid the foundation in their hearts, and he will finish it, and bring forth the top-stone:" he has reserved heaven for them; and he will keep them for *it*[c].]

For this Jesus pledges his own veracity and his Father's power—

[It is not asserted here, that they shall never *be tempted:* nor is it asserted that they shall never *fall:* but it is asserted that they shall never *perish,* nor be *plucked out of their Redeemer's hand.* What shall we say then? That they are at liberty to live in sin? No; there is no such licence allowed them. The way in which they shall be kept from perishing, is, by giving them "grace sufficient for them," by enabling them to "mortify the deeds of the body," and by sanctifying them throughout in body, soul, and spirit," and by "bruising Satan under their feet." In this way they will be made "more than conquerors through Him that loved them." And, because Jesus was about to leave his Disciples, and to commit the keeping of them to his heavenly Father, he pledges himself, that his Father also, who was infinitely above all created Powers, yea, and greater than he himself also as man, and as Mediator, should effectually preserve them; and that no enemy should prevail against them, unless he should first overcome Jehovah himself. This then being secured to them by a promise that cannot fail, and by a power that cannot be overcome, we may congratulate the sheep of Christ in the words of their good Shepherd; "Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom."]

Now

[c] 1 Pet. i. 4, 5.

Now because of the singular importance of this subject, we shall,

1. Guard it against abuse—

[By referring the final issue of our warfare to the veracity and power of God, rather than to the faithfulness and diligence of man, it may be thought that we open a door for licentiousness of manners, or at least for carelessness and indifference in our spiritual concerns. But if it be recollected what has been stated as the character of Christ's sheep, (that "they hear his voice" and "follow his steps;") and what has been declared as to the manner of perfecting in them the good work, (that God enables them to mortify sin, and to vanquish Satan;) what room can there be for the objection of its tending to licentiousness? If however there be any man disposed to say, 'God will not suffer me to perish, therefore I will be careless about my walk and conduct,' he needs nothing more to prove that he is not one of Christ's sheep; he has not the smallest resemblance to his sheep; he is altogether deaf to the voice of Christ; he walks in a way directly opposite to his; and, instead of vanquishing sin and Satan, he is overcome by them. Whatever therefore he may call himself, he is no other than a wolf in sheep's clothing. To imagine that he can attain the end without the means, is absurd; for God has ordained not only *the end*, but *the means*, and the end BY the means. See how clearly this is stated by St. Paul: "God," says he, "hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth[d]." To what hath God chosen us? to enjoy the means of grace? to possess heaven, if we can earn it by our good works? No; he has chosen us *to salvation*, even "to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ." But has he left it to our choice in what way this end shall be attained? No: he has appointed "sanctification of the Spirit, and belief of the truth," as the way to it: and if we are not proceeding in that way, it is in vain to think of ever attaining that end. If we choose to walk in sin, we may; but it will infallibly lead us to perdition: holiness is the appointed path to heaven; and "without holiness no man shall see the Lord." To those, therefore, who would take the comfort arising from this subject, we recommend, that they judge of their *state* by their *character* and *conduct:* if they resemble Christ, and are walking truly in his ways, let them confidently trust in Him who "is able to keep them from falling, and to present them faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy:" but let them never entertain the thought of reaching heaven in any other than the appointed way: for, if

[d] 2 Thess. ii. 13, 14.

if they resemble "the goats," it is in vain to hope that they shall have their portion with "the sheep."]

2. To defend it against objections—

[Many are the objections confidently urged against the doctrines here maintained: and I most willingly acknowledge that these mysterious truths are to be stated with extreme caution, and that they should occupy only such a space in our general ministrations as they appear to occupy in the holy Scriptures. Yet we must not keep back any part of divine truth; but, when occasion offers, must "declare the whole counsel of God." It is true, that many pious men cannot receive these doctrines; and therefore we should, as much as possible, avoid such a statement of them as may wound their minds: still, however, we are not called to suppress the mention of them, but only to concede to others what we claim for ourselves, the right of forming our own judgment, and of being treated with respect and candour by those who differ from us.

It is said that the doctrines before stated are contrary to *Scripture*, to *fact*, and to the interests of *morality*.

The *Scripture*, it is said, abounds with warnings and exhortations to obedience; in many of which our final enjoyment of God's favour is actually suspended on our perseverance in his ways. All this is true; and we are grieved, when any, from an undue attachment to human systems, attempt to deny it: but is it not also true that the Scriptures abound with passages of like import with the text[e]? The great fault of those who adopt human systems is, that they will be wise above what is written, and, instead of receiving God's word as little children, will presume to reject every thing which they cannot reconcile with their own favourite opinions. Who could ever reconcile God's foreknowledge with the free-will of man? but who will venture to deny either? So, we may not see how to reconcile God's determination to keep his people, with his cautions against the danger of apostacy; and yet God's determinations may exist, without superseding the need of fear and caution on our part; nay, I am persuaded, that they are carried into effect by means of that very fear which his warnings inspire. And this is, I apprehend, the true solution of the difficulty, as far as it can be solved by man. God's *precepts* teach us what we ought to do: his *exhortations* put us upon making every exertion in our power: his *threatenings* humble us for our short-comings and defects: his *promises* incline us to look to him for strength: and his *covenanted engagements* encourage us to "hope even against hope," and to renew our exertions in an assured expectation of

[e] Job xvii. 9. Isai. liv. 17. Jer. xxxii. 40.

of ultimate success. View the different portions of Scripture in this way, and, whatever the heat of controversy may lead men to urge against each other, there will be found no real opposition between them, but a perfect harmony in every part.

But, it may be said, it is contrary to *fact* that the Lord's people are so preserved; for the Inspired Records inform us of many who "made shipwreck of their faith," and "whose end," in consequence of their apostacy, was "worse than their beginning." This also is true: but it disproves not one atom of what is asserted in our text.

Hear what St. John says to this very point: he acknowledges that some had apostatized from the truth: but, says he, "They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us[f]." To this it may be replied, that, if apostates are disclaimed as having ever really belonged to Christ, it is impossible to tell who do really belong to him. I readily acknowledge, that no man can know either that he himself belongs to Christ, or that any other person does, except by his works, or in any degree further than he is warranted by his life and conversation. If a man have the mark and character of Christ's sheep, he may have a good hope that he belongs to Christ; but, the very moment that he declines from that character, his evidences of relation to Christ decay, and, together with them, his hope of ultimate acceptance with him. "The foundation of God standeth sure; the Lord knoweth them that are his: but let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity."

As to the objection that these doctrines are contrary to the interests of *morality*, it has been already answered, when we were guarding this subject from abuse. The doctrine that asserts that we shall be *kept in the way of holiness*, can never be inimical to the interests of holiness. But we would further ask, What must be the effect of denying these doctrines? Will not men be tempted to trust in an arm of flesh? And will not that issue in disappointment? and will not repeated disappointments tend to create despondency? People are apt to dread the idea of despondency as connected with the doctrines of grace: but we will venture to affirm, that, for one instance of despondency arising from a view of the sovereignty of God, and of our entire dependence upon his power and grace, an hundred instances arise from a want of just views of this subject. What is the answer which we uniformly receive when we exhort men to walk in the steps of Christ? Is it not *this!* 'We *cannot:* You require more of us than we are able to

[f] 1 John ii. 19. See this also confirmed by facts, Luke xxii. 31, 32. John xvii. 12.

to perform?' Of course, in these persons exertion is discouraged; and they remain bond-slaves of Satan, because they conceive it impossible that they should be delivered from his power: whereas, the person who believes that God is all-sufficient and faithful to his promises, is encouraged to renew his application to him from day to day, and, even under the most distressing circumstances, to expect a happy termination of his conflicts. A view of God, as "able to keep us from falling," and as engaged to "perfect that which concerneth us," will be a cordial to the drooping soul; and will enable us to adopt the triumphant language of Christ himself; "He is near that justifieth me; who will contend with me? Let us stand together; Who is mine adversary? let him come near to me. Behold, the Lord God will help me; who is he that shall condemn me[g]?" And what the effect will be of such a cheering hope as this, I leave you to judge. Only see it realized in the apostle Paul, and we have no fear about any conclusions that shall be drawn from it[h].]

3. Improve it for your encouragement—

[What unspeakable encouragement is here afforded to those who are yet ignorant of Christ! Who can hear this saying, and not wish to be numbered amongst his sheep? Methinks the hope of obtaining such security should induce every one to return from his wanderings, and to put himself under his guidance and protection. Where shall we find any such promise made to those who are at a distance from the fold of Christ? Where has God said to *them*, "Ye shall never perish?" To *them* belongs rather that tremendous threatening, "Except ye repent, ye shall all perish." O that all who are going astray might consider this, and "return immediately to the Shepherd and Bishop of their souls!"

To you who have fled to him for refuge, here is indeed strong consolation. You are sensible of manifold corruptions, any one of which is sufficient to destroy your souls. You feel your weakness too, and your utter inability to withstand that roaring lion that seeketh to devour you. What then would you do, if you were left to preserve yourselves by the unassisted efforts of your own strength and resolution? To you it is no little joy to be assured, that you are in the hands of an Omnipotent Being, against whom neither earth nor hell shall ever be able to prevail, and who engages in your behalf, that you shall never perish[i]. Learn then to "cast your care on Him," and to commit the keeping of your souls to Him in well-doing, as into the hands of a faithful Creator[k]."]

[g] Isai. l. 8, 9.
[h] Rom. viii. 33—39.
[i] 1 John iv. 4.
[k] 1 Pet. iv. 19.

DCCCXVII.

CHRIST ONE WITH THE FATHER.

John x. 30. 'I and my Father are one.

IT might well be expected, that, if God should reveal his will to man, there would be many things disclosed by him, which exceed the narrow limits of human reason. This might more particularly be expected in whatsoever related to his own person and character: for, as we can know nothing of him any farther than he is pleased to reveal himself to us; and as we cannot even comprehend our own nature, or discover how the soul is united to the body; it would be strange indeed if we could comprehend the mode of God's existence, and explain how there should be an union of Three Persons in the Godhead. In relation to such a mysterious subject, our wisdom is to ascertain what God has revealed concerning himself, and to receive it on the testimony of his word. This is the office of reason, as well as of faith: for reason requires, that we submit our understandings to the dictates of His wisdom, no less than our wills to the influence of His authority. That a Trinity of Persons in the Godhead is revealed, cannot reasonably be doubted, as long as the baptismal rite shall continue to be administered "in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost:" for to imagine, that a creature is here associated with Almighty God in the highest possible act of Divine worship, were the height of absurdity, and impiety. The subject before us relates only to the union subsisting between Christ and his Father: to that therefore we shall confine our attention. We begin with,

I. The assertion of Christ—

Our Lord says, "I and my Father are one." Now it must be remembered, that the same expressions are used, as in human compositions, so also in the holy Scriptures, sometimes in a metaphorical and figurative sense, and sometimes in a plain and literal sense; and their true import must always be judged of by the context. This is particularly the case

with

with respect to the expression before us; which is elsewhere used in reference to the saints, to mark the exalted state to which they are raised by their connexion with Christ, and the mutual interest which they should feel in each other's concerns: "I pray for them, that they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us; that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. And the glory which thou gavest me, I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one: I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one[a]." Here the sense is obvious: no one could conceive for a moment that the union here spoken of is *personal*, as though the saints could be one *person* with God, or one *person* in their collective capacity: it simply means, that the saints are to enjoy an union with God and with each other, as nearly resembling that which subsists between Christ and his Father, as their situation and circumstances will admit of, namely, an union of sentiment, of affection, of will, and of operation. But, in the passage under our consideration, more is evidently intended: in that is implied, not merely a figurative, but a *real* and *personal* union, an union of nature and of essence. In proof of this, we must refer you to,

1. The whole scope of the passage—

[Our Lord is speaking of the security which his sheep enjoyed; that "He gives unto them eternal life, and that they shall never perish, nor shall any one ever pluck them out of his hand." But, because he was speedily to be taken from them, and might therefore be supposed incapable of fulfilling this promise, he says, that "his Father was confessedly greater than all" created powers, yea, greater than he himself was in his human or Mediatorial capacity; and that "none should ever be able to pluck them out of his Father's hand." Yet, that they might know that he would not on account of his removal from them remit his care of them, he added, "I and my Father are one;"—'we are one, as in will, so in power; as in operation, so in nature and in essence: and consequently my sheep have a double pledge of their security.'

This is the plain meaning of the passage; and that it is so, may be clearly seen from,]

2. The

[a] John xvii. 20—23.

2. The construction which the Jews put upon his words—

[They took up stones immediately, to stone him: and when he inquired, for which of all his good works they were about to stone him, they replied, that it was "not for any good work, but for blasphemy; because that He, who was only a man like themselves, made himself God[b]." Now this shews incontestably what meaning *they* affixed to his words: it was not an ignorant individual, or persons ill acquainted with the received import of the words, that so interpreted them; but the whole audience, who perfectly understood what meaning his expressions were suited to convey.

The Jews were taught by God himself to be particularly jealous on the subject of idolatry; and to put to death any person who should, whether openly or in secret, attempt to seduce them to it. When therefore they heard our Lord arrogate to himself divine honours, they resented it, as they had done repeatedly before, by taking up stones to stone him as a blasphemer[c]. We do not say, that they were right in expressing their abhorrence of idolatry in this way; because they should have had the matter examined before a magistrate, and have acted according to evidence, and not according to the impulse of their blind passions: but we do say, that Jesus was justly accused of blasphemy, if he was not God; and that there was just cause for the indignation which his audience expressed.

But perhaps they were mistaken in their construction of his words: in which case we may be assured that Jesus would carefully rectify their error. But do we find that he did disclaim the assertion which they called blasphemy? No;]

In his answers to them we find only,

II. His confirmation of it—

They had just complained that he kept them in suspense; and had desired that he would tell them plainly, who, and what, he was. He, in reply, declares that he had told them, and that they would not believe[d]. Had he told them that he was a mere man like themselves, they would readily enough have believed *that:* but when he tells them again that he was "one with his Father," they go about to stone him for blasphemy. Nevertheless, instead of revoking his word, he vindicates his claim; and establishes the justice of it,

1. By

[b] ver. 32, 33. [c] John v. 17, 18. & viii. 58, 59. [d] ver. 25.

1. By an appeal to the Sacred Writings—

[Magistrates, he tells them, were in the Inspired Volume frequently dignified with the name of gods[e]: and he refers them to one passage in particular well known to them all, "I have said, Ye are gods." Now these were called gods on two accounts; first, because they were Jehovah's Representatives and Vice-gerents upon earth; and next, because *they were types of the Messiah, who was to be really and truly God*, even "EMMANUEL, GOD WITH US[g]." 'Now,' says our Lord, 'if these persons, *in order to prepare you for the reception of your incarnate God*, were honoured with the name and title of gods, and you readily acquiesced in it, with what reason can you, when your incarnate God appears, accuse him of blasphemy, because he assumes that title, or calls himself by a name which you justly consider as equivalent to it? You are looking for your Messiah; and that Messiah is expressly foretold under the character of "Jehovah's fellow[h]," who is "David's Lord as well as David's Son[i]:" such therefore the Messiah *must* be; for "*the Scripture cannot be broken*:" why then do you not acknowledge the justice of my claim? If indeed I do not give evidence enough that I am the Messiah, you may justly dispute my title to be regarded as God; but if I do, then you are the blasphemers, who rob me of my proper honour. Know ye then, that I am the Person, "whom the Father hath sanctified" and set apart from all eternity to the office, "and now hath sent into the world" to execute it: know also, that, instead of retracting any thing I have said, I repeat my assertions, and demand your acknowledgment of me in my true character.'

Thus our Lord confirms his assertion by an appeal to Scripture. He next proceeds to confirm it,]

2. By an appeal to his own works—

['I do not desire to be credited in such an assertion upon my bare unsupported word, without any corroborating evidence;' says our Lord: '"If I do not the works of my Father, believe me not: but, if I do, though ye believe not me, believe the works; that ye may know and believe, that the Father is in me, and I in him[k]." Consider my works, both *the matter*, and the *manner* of them, and see if they do not justify every assertion I have made. Did ever *man* perform such miracles as I have done, so many, so great, so benevolent, so demonstrative of a divine agency? Moses indeed and the Prophets wrought some few miracles: but *how*? they wrought them uniformly by application to Jehovah for the intervention of

[e] Exod. vii. 1. & xxii. 28. [f] Ps. lxxxii. 6. [g] Isai. vii. 14. Matt. i. 23.
[h] Zech. xiii. 7. [i] Ps. cx. 1. with Matt. xxii. 42—45.
[k] ver. 37, 38.

of his power: but look at my miracles: on some occasions indeed, I also, acting in my Mediatorial capacity, have acknowledged my dependence on him, and have acted "in his name," as his servant[l]; (for as Mediator, I *am* his servant:) but, as being *One* with the Father, I have wrought in instances without number by that power and authority which I possess in common with the Father. Whence had I the power to still the elements, as I have done[m]; or to expel Satan[n], or to raise the dead[o]? When the leper justly acknowledged my power to effect whatsoever I *would*; to whom was I indebted for power to heal him, when I said, "I *will*, Be thou clean[p]?"'

Such an appeal as this was sufficient to convince the most incredulous: and it receives much additional light from the manner in which the Apostles wrought their miracles: they wrought them invariably *in the name of Jesus*[q]; and disclaimed all idea of any inherent power in themselves, or even of any goodness on account of which God had wrought by them; so fearful were they, lest by any means they should rob the Lord Jesus of the honour due unto his name[r].

Shall it be said that our Lord did not mean in this appeal to assert his true and proper Godhead? Then see both his words, and the sense in which his enraged adversaries continued to understand them: "Though ye believe not me, believe the works; *that ye may know and believe*, that the Father is in me, and I in him.—*Therefore they sought again to take him.*" Here are two things demonstrated; first, that his enemies understood him to affect equality with God: and next, that He, knowing that they did so understand him, renewed and confirmed the assertions which they had so interpreted. A clearer explanation of what he affirmed, or a stronger proof of WHAT HE IS, we cannot reasonably desire.]

We are the more earnest in establishing the Divinity of our blessed Lord, because it is intimately connected with every fundamental truth of our holy religion. LEARN then from it,

1. The dignity of his person:—

[Because God condescended to take our nature upon him, we requite his love by denying him to be God. But know that Jesus Christ is indeed "the true God[s]," "the mighty God[t]," "the great God and our Saviour[u]," God over all

[l] Luke xi. 41—43. [m] Mark iv. 39. [n] Mark ix. 25.
[o] Mark v. 41. Luke vii. 14. [p] Matt. viii. 3.
[q] Acts ix. 34. & xvi. 18. [r] Acts iii. 6, 12, 16. with iv. 9, 10, 12.
[s] 1 John v. 20. [t] Isai. ix. 6. [u] Tit. ii. 13.

all blessed for evermore[x]." He is "the brightness of his Father's glory, and the express image of his person[y];" yea, in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily[z]." Hear what he himself saith unto Philip: Philip, having heard him speaking of the Father, as actually known to his Disciples, and already seen by them, saith, "Lord, shew us the Father, and it sufficeth us." To this Jesus replies, "Have *I* been so long with you, and hast thou not known *me*, Philip? He that hath seen *me*, hath seen *the Father*; and how sayest thou then, Shew us the Father? Believest thou not that I am in the Father, and the Father in me? Believe me, that I *am* in the Father, and the Father in me; or else believe me for the very works' sake[a]." Now, I ask, If Jesus had not been really "one with the Father, would he have dared to use such language as this? And, if his Disciples were guilty of idolatry in worshipping him, was not the fault altogether *his?* Were not his words and his arguments expressly calculated to mislead and deceive them? But there is no room for doubt on this head. We never can entertain too high thoughts of him; nor can we ever honour him as we ought, unless we "*honour him, even as we honour the Father*[b]."]

2. The virtue of his sacrifice—

[On the dignity of his person depends the whole value of his atonement. The Apostle justly observes, that "it is not possible for the blood of bulls and of goats to take away sin:" and the same observation may with justice be applied to every creature, however exalted. But when we are assured that it was "*God* who was manifest in the flesh[c]," that it was "*the Lord of Glory* that was crucified[d]," and that it was "*God* who purchased the Church with his own blood[e]," we no longer hesitate to declare that his death was "a full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice, oblation, and satisfaction for the sins of the whole world[f]." He was, it is true, "in the form of a servant; but he was also in the form of God, and thought it not robbery to be equal with God[g];" and therefore we may be assured that "his blood will cleanse us from all sin[h]." The ransom he has paid for us, is fully equal to the redemption of a ruined world: and the righteousness which he has wrought out for us by his obedience unto death, is all that is wanted for the justification of those who trust in it. The very name given him by the prophet declares this; for

[x] Rom. ix. 5. [y] Heb. i. 3. [z] Col. ii. 9.
[a] John xiv. 7—11. [b] John v. 23. [c] 1 Tim. iii. 16.
[d] 1 Cor. ii. 8. [e] Acts xx. 28.
[f] The Communion Service; & 1 John ii. 2. [g] Phil. ii. 6—8.
[h] 1 John i. 7.

for we are taught to "call him, JEHOVAH OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS[j]." Here then "the weary and heavy-laden may find rest unto their souls."]

3. The sufficiency of his grace—

[If Jesus were only a creature, those who trust in him might be addressed like the worshippers of Baal, "Cry aloud, for he is a god: either he is talking, or he is pursuing, or he is on a journey; or peradventure he sleepeth, and must be awaked[k]." He could not attend to the concerns of the whole universe at once; and therefore could not be a suitable object of our trust and confidence. But he is infinitely above all creatures, being "King of kings, and Lord of lords[l]." He could truly say to Paul, and to every suppliant in the universe, "My grace is sufficient for thee." Let not any one then despond, as though his corruptions were irremediable, or his enemies invincible; for "God hath laid help for us upon One that is mighty[m]:" and the weakest of the human race that relies on him, may confidently say, "In the Lord have I righteousness and strength[n]:" "The Lord Jehovah is my strength and my song; he also is become my salvation[o]:" "The Lord is my shepherd; therefore can I lack nothing[p]."]

4. The excellency of his salvation—

[If we consider the price that has been paid, we may judge of the value of that redemption which has been purchased for us. Even in relation to the present life, we are told that "eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him[q]." Under whatever figure they are spoken of, they are represented as exceeding all human apprehension: "the gift of them is unspeakable[r]:" "the riches of them unsearchable[s]:" "the peace that is enjoyed by means of them, passeth understanding[t];" and "the joy which they produce, is unspeakable and glorified[u]:" the love that bestowed them has "a height and depth, and length and breadth" that can never be explored[v]. Respecting the future life, we are still further from being able to appreciate the glories of it. The description of heaven, as a city paved with gold, and enriched with every thing magnificent or good, affords but a faint idea of that blessed place[x]; as the songs and music of its inhabitants very inadequately

[j] Jer. xxxiii. 16.
[k] 1 Kin. xviii. 27.
[l] Rev. xix. 16.
[m] Ps. lxxxix. 19.
[n] Isai. xlv. 24.
[o] Isai. xii. 2.
[p] Ps. xxiii. 1.
[q] Isai. lxiv. 4. 1 Cor. ii. 9, 10.
[r] 2 Cor. ix. 15.
[s] Eph. iii. 8.
[t] Phil. iv. 7.
[u] Eph. iii. 18.
[x] Rev. xxi. 10—23.

inadequately represent their blessedness and joy[y]. But this we know, that, both on earth and in heaven, the felicity of the saints shall be worthy of the sacrifice that was made to obtain it. Let not any one then seek it in a listless and lukewarm manner, as though it were of little value; for it is a "great salvation[z]," which the tongues of men and angels can never worthily describe, nor can the ages of eternity suffice to enumerate its blessings.]

[y] Rev. v. 8—14. & xiv. 1—3. [z] Heb. ii. 3.

DCCCXVIII.

THE PROPHETIC COUNSEL OF CAIAPHAS.

John xi. 51, 52. *This spake he not of himself; but, being high priest that year, he prophesied, that Christ should die for that nation; and not for that nation only, but that also he should gather together in one the children of God that were scattered abroad.*

IT is often found that the people who are not humbled and converted by the Gospel, are irritated and incensed by it; and that, to justify their rejection of its truths, they become persecutors of those who preach it. When their prejudices are once excited, nothing will allay them. However exemplary a Minister may be in his conduct, however benevolent in his purposes, however wise and discreet in his exertions, he cannot escape their censure, or ward off their hatred. Rather than he should pass without censure, the very best actions of his life shall be brought against him as grounds of accusation. The abundance of his labours and the success of his endeavours shall be reported as matters worthy of blame, and shall be made the grounds of inveterate persecution. It was thus when our blessed Lord himself ministered on earth. His wisdom or benevolence none can doubt: yet was he "a butt of contradiction[a]" to all around him. He had just wrought a stupendous miracle in raising from the grave a man who had been dead four days, and who, in that climate, must have begun to putrify. Would any one suppose that this should give offence? yet behold,

[a] Σημεῖον ἀντιλεγόμενον.

behold, some who were present, went and made the miracle an occasion of grievous complaint; insomuch that the high priest instantly convened a Council, in order to concert measures for preventing a repetition of such offences in future. After some of the chief priests had offered their opinions, the high priest himself, in a very contemptuous and dictatorial tone, decided the point at once; and determined, that private, should give way to public, good: this, he said, common policy required; and therefore it was expedient to destroy the author of this benevolent act, lest the popularity which he had acquired by means of it, should excite the jealousy of the Roman Government, and call down their vengeance on the whole nation. This advice was immediately, though not unanimously[b], agreed to; (for any argument will suffice, when prejudice is the judge;) and means were instantly adopted for executing the decree. But the text informs us, that this advice, pronounced as it was with oracular authority, was indeed an oracle; though it was dictated by God in a very different sense from that in which it was intended by Caiaphas. We shall therefore illustrate it in both points of view:

I. As intended by Caiaphas—

Caiaphas meant only, that, as the State would be (in his apprehension) endangered by the popularity of Jesus, common policy required that they should destroy him at once. But what advice was this to come from a Minister of religion, yea, from God's high priest!

1. How unjust!

[Here was nothing criminal laid to the charge of our blessed Lord; yet was he to be treated as a criminal, and to be put to death as a malefactor. On what principle could this be justified? We do not hesitate to say, that nothing can warrant such a procedure. If a man think that he can benefit the State by exposing his own life, he is at liberty to do it; yea, every true Christian ought to be willing to "lay down his life for the brethren:" he should even account the sacrificing

[b] Luke xxiii. 51.

sacrificing of his life in such a cause, to be rather a source of exultation and triumph, than of dread and sorrow[c]. But no tribunal under heaven can take away the life of an innocent man: nor ought that which is radically unjust, ever to be sanctioned by legal authority.]

2. How impious!

[It was acknowledged by Caiaphas himself, that Jesus had wrought "miracles," "many" miracles; and miracles of such a nature as to carry conviction with them to every beholder[d]. Now these miracles proved to demonstration, that Jesus was sent by God himself: they were the broad seal of Heaven attesting his Divine commission. What then was the advice, but a direct oppositon to God himself? There was not so much as an attempt to cover the impiety: a fear of man's displeasure was the avowed and only reason for the commission of it. To what a height of wickedness must that man have attained, who could offer such advice; and that Council who could adopt it!]

3. How absurd!

[The Jewish history might have shewn the Council, that the Romans could not prevail against them any further than God authorized and empowered them to do so. Consequently, if they looked no further than to their temporal happiness, it was their wisdom rather to conciliate the favour of God by doing what was right, than to provoke him to anger by murdering his dear Son. Yet, so infatuated were they, as to fear "the axe, rather than him that heweth therewith;" and to draw down the certain displeasure of the Almighty, rather than incur the danger of displeasing a worm like themselves. The event proved the folly of their choice: for the very means they used to avoid destruction, brought down destruction upon them, and that too from the very persons whose favour they had so impiously courted. In the space of forty years, God executed upon them the most signal vengeance: he inflicted upon them the judgment he had warned them of; and made use of the Roman armies "miserably to destroy those murderers, and to burn up their city[e]."]

But we are told that Caiaphas "spake this not of himself." He meant indeed what he said; but his words bear a very different construction,

II. As dictated by God—

Since the Jews had been brought under the Roman yoke,

[c] 1 John iii. 16. Phil. ii. 17.
[d] ver. 47, 48.
[e] Matt. xxi. 38—41. & xxii. 7.

yoke, the high priesthood, instead of being continued to the end of life, was changed as often as the interests of the Roman Government appeared to require it. It now happened, that, notwithstanding Annas, the predecessor of Caiaphas, was yet alive, Caiaphas was high priest. And, as God in former times had enabled the high priests, by means of the Urim and Thummim, to declare his will, it pleased him now so to over-rule the mind of Caiaphas, that he should utter a prophecy, when of himself he designed nothing more than to give the most impious advice. And though this was certainly a remarkable instance of God's interposition, it was by no means singular: for none of the Prophets fully understood the import of their own words[f]: some prophesied without any direct intention on their part[g]; and others, in words most opposite to their own wishes[h].

In this prophecy he unwittingly declared,

1. The end of Christ's death—

[Be astonished, O heavens! this inveterate enemy of Christ, at the very moment when he proposed that he should be put to death, proclaimed, that *it was not for his own sins, but for the good of others!* How careful was God to clear the innocence of his Son, when, in addition to this wretched pontiff, he stirred up Judas who betrayed him, and Pilate who condemned him, and one of the malefactors that suffered with him, and the centurion who superintended his execution, to unite their testimony to this effect! With this prophecy of Caiaphas agree those of Daniel and Isaiah, that "the Messiah was to be cut off, but *not for himself*[i];" that he was to be "wounded for *our* transgressions, and bruised for *our* iniquities[k]." Yes, "he died, the just for the unjust[l]:" he was "a propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world[m]."]

2. The efficacy of it—

[Caiaphas intimated, that if this Jesus were put to death, all cause of fear would cease, and the whole nation would enjoy both peace and safety. Blessed truth! provided only we believe in Jesus: we then indeed have nothing to fear from

[f] Compare Ps. xxii. 16—18. with 1 Pet. i. 10—12.
[g] 1 Sam. x. 10—12. [h] Numb. xxii. 38. with xxiv. 10.
[i] Dan. ix. 26. [k] Isai. liii. 5. [l] 1 Pet. iii. 18. [m] 1 John ii. 2.

from those who have enslaved us, or from those who seek our ruin, sin, Satan, death, and hell shall all be disarmed of their power. The whole Israel of God, wheresoever "scattered," are the nation of whom Caiaphas unwittingly spake: they are "a holy nation:" they are interested in all that Christ has done or suffered: they "are gathered into one" great community; partakers of one heavenly nature; members of one mystical body; and heirs of one eternal glory[n]. Caiaphas, thy words are true; "they are tried to the uttermost:" that Jesus, whom thou persecutedst, "has by death destroyed death, and delivered those who were all their life-time subject to bondage[o]."]

INFER,

1. How mysterious is the providence of God!

[That act which was *in itself* the most atrocious that ever was committed, was *in its effects* the best! How deep a mystery! the life of the world secured by the death of God's only Son! But so it is still: "God's ways are in the great deep:" and the very efforts which are made by men and devils for the destruction of his people, are instrumental to their establishment and growth in grace. And the time shall come when all the saints shall see as much reason to bless God for the malice exercised towards themselves in particular, as now they see to adore him for the accomplishment of his word in and by the Lord Jesus.]

2. How rich his grace!

[For whom was it that Jesus died? it was "for *that* nation;" that nation that abused so many mercies, and persetuted so many prophets, and imbrued their hands in the blood of God's only Son! Even Caiaphas himself, with all that were concerned in that unparalleled transaction, were free to accept of mercy, and, by the sprinkling of the blood of Christ upon their souls, to be cleansed from the guilt of shedding it. Nor are *we* excluded from the benefit. Whatever guilt we may have contracted, the way is open for us, if we desire reconciliation with our offended God: "Not one that comes to him shall ever be cast out." Let this grace, this "exceedingly rich grace," fill us with astonishment, and be now, as it certainly will be in the eternal world, the subject of our incessant praise.]

[n] Rev. v. 9. [o] Heb. ii. 14, 15.

DCCCXIX.

OUR LORD'S VIEWS OF HIS OWN DEATH.

John xii. 23, 24. *Jesus answered them, saying, The hour is come that the Son of man should be glorified. Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit.*

THE nearer our Lord's death approached, the more he delighted to speak of it. So far from regarding it as an object of terror, he was longing for its accomplishment. To his Disciples he had frequently declared the precise manner of it, together with all its antecedent indignities; and now he declares it to some strangers, whom curiosity had led to visit him.

Whether those strangers were Jews or Heathens, is not agreed: but from the general use of the term which we translate "*Greeks*," and from the difficulty which the Disciples felt about introducing them to Jesus, we apprehend that they were Heathens, who had been proselyted to the worship of the true God, but were not become Jews by circumcision. Jesus had forbidden his Disciples to enter into any cities of the Gentiles, when he sent them out to preach his Gospel; and therefore they might well doubt the propriety of introducing Gentiles to him; which Philip did not venture to do, till he had conferred with Andrew, and consulted Jesus himself also on the point. When, however, they were brought to him, he advertised them of his approaching death, which he represented as *a source of honour to himself*, and *of benefit to man*. In these two views we shall consider it,

I. As a source of honour to himself—

He speaks not of being *crucified*, but *glorified*: for his death was indeed a *glory* to him:

1. As atoning for the sins of the whole world—

[This is the true light wherein to view his death: it was a sacrifice for sin, for the sins of all mankind: and it perfectly satisfied all the demands of law and justice, so that "God

"God may be just and yet the justifier of all who believe in Jesus"———View the death of Christ in this light, and say whether his crown of thorns were not his brightest diadem; and the cross on which he expired, his most glorious throne? Men indeed saw nothing but shame in his crucifixion; but God and angels beheld it replete with glory[a].———]

2. As opening a way for the salvation of all mankind—

[Being "lifted up, he was to draw all men unto him[b]." He was the true "Shiloh, unto whom the gathering of the people should be." Had he been the Saviour of Jews only, it had been comparatively a light matter; but being God's salvation to the ends of the earth, he was most glorious in the eyes of God himself[c]. Behold, now already was he reaping the first-fruits of that harvest which was soon to be gathered in: the solicitude of these Greeks to be made acquainted with him was an earnest of that more extended dominion which he was speedily to possess. And who can reflect on "his erecting thus his standard to the nations," and not acknowledge "his rest to be glorious[d]?" Indeed this gathering of the people to him is represented by the Prophets as constituting the summit of his glory[e]——— and he himself is "satisfied with all the travail of his soul, when he reaps this as its appointed fruit." But the songs of the Redeemed in heaven are the best evidence of this unquestionable truth[f].]

Our Lord next speaks of his death,

II. As a source of benefit to man—

The illustration here used is familiar to all: every one knows, that a grain of wheat, if left exposed upon a rock will be unproductive; but that if buried in the earth, it will corrupt, and vegetate, and bring forth fruit. Now to this our Lord compares his death.

If he had not died, he would not have proved a Saviour to any—

[If he had not died, there would have been no atonement made, no sin forgiven, no soul of man delivered. There was no other way in which God could have been reconciled to his sinful creatures, consistently with his justice, holiness, and truth———In vain would Christ himself have become incarnate,

[a] John xiii. 31. [b] ver. 32. [c] Isai. xlix. 5, 6.
[d] Isai. xi. 10. [e] Isai. lv. 5. & lx. 8, 9.
[f] Rev. vii. 9—14.

incarnate, if he had not died: in vain would he have fulfilled the law himself, and set us a perfect example of obedience: if he had not completed the work by his death, the demands of law and justice had been still unsatisfied, and every child of Adam must have perished. As for any attempt on our part to supply the deficiency, either by repentance or amendment, it would have answered no purpose; it would have left us under the curses of the broken law———]

But by his death millions obtain life—

[It is not thirty, or sixty, or an hundred-fold, that that grain of corn produces, but millions, innumerable as the sands upon the sea-shore: "the fruit of it shall shake like Lebanon, and they that spring up from it in the city shall be as the piles of grass upon the earth[g]. Think of the fruit produced by it in the Apostolic age, and that which is yet growing from it in every quarter of the globe, and that which will arise in the Millennium, when the knowledge of the Lord shall cover the earth as the waters cover the sea: truly it will at last be a multitude, which no man can number, out of every kindred and nation, and tongue and people; all growing upon that his root—all deriving life from his stem—all assimilated to his image—and all treasured up at last in the same garner! And is one single soul of such value, that the whole world is as nothing in comparison of it? What then is the benefit arising to mankind from the death of Christ! how vast! how extensive! how incalculable!]

ADDRESS,

1. Those who are inquiring after Jesus—

[If any are saying, like these Greeks, "Sir, we would see Jesus," we bless God who has put that desire into their hearts: and we shall be glad to be instrumental in any respect in introducing them to him. Of one thing we can confidently assure them, that there no longer exists any barrier to their admission to his presence, provided they desire in sincerity of heart to devote themselves to his service: whatever be their nation, their profession, their character, they are alike welcome, if they come with penitence and faith; and may be assured, that "he will in no wise cast them out." Would they know what he would principally commend to their attention? we answer, He would direct them to consider his death as the most stupendous display of his love, and an inexhaustible source of blessings to their souls. Reflect then, ye inquiring people, on the Saviour's love, and give him the glory due unto his name.]

2. Those who profess themselves his followers—

[As Jesus had frequently told his own Disciples that they

[g] Ps. lxxii. 16.

they must be ready to lay down their lives for him, so he now declared to these strangers, that these were the only terms on which he would accept them as his people. The wheat must resemble that from which it sprang; and the disciples be conformed to the image of their Lord. Nor must they only be willing to suffer like him, but *must account those sufferings their glory*. This was the practice of the Apostles; and must be the practice of all who would adorn the Gospel [h]. We should feel no difficulty in pronouncing *him* honoured and glorified, who should be irradiated with a glory, like Moses, or have the Holy Ghost lighting visibly on him, as once he did on the Apostles: with equal confidence then may we pronounce *him* glorified, who bears his cross after Jesus; for "the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon him [i]." Remember then, Brethren, that these are the terms on which Christ acknowledges you as his; and "arm yourselves with the mind that was in him." Be content to "suffer with him; and then you shall also be glorified together."]

[h] Acts v. 41. [i] 1 Pet. iv. 12—14.

DCCCXX.

THE EFFECTS OF CHRIST'S DEATH.

John xii. 31, 32. *Now is the judgment of this world: now shall the prince of this world be cast out. And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me.*

INCONCEIVABLY arduous was the work which Christ had undertaken: yet amidst his heaviest trials his confidence never for a moment forsook him. He had just complained of the insupportable weight of his mental agonies; yet not so complained, but that he had desired his heavenly Father to glorify his own name, whatever sufferings he might have to endure for that end. For the satisfaction of those who would otherwise have drawn wrong conclusions from those sufferings, the Father answered him by a voice like thunder, "I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again:" and immediately Jesus, with his wonted calmness, resumed his discourse respecting the nature and necessity of his approaching death, and confidently predicted,

I. The issue of his conflicts—

The

The world and Satan were his great adversaries: and though by his death they would appear victorious over him, yet he declared that by his death,

1. The world would be judged—

[What we are to understand by "the judgment of this world," we cannot absolutely determine: but we apprehend the import of that expression to be, that his death would be the means of exhibiting in the clearest view, first, *the wickedness*, and next, *the desert* of the ungodly world.

Who would have conceived *the wickedness* of the world to be so great as it really is? Who would have conceived, that, if God himself should become incarnate, and sojourn in a familiar manner upon earth, and cause the light of his perfections to shine around him, and diffuse innumerable blessings by the unbounded exercise of omnipotence and love, his creatures should rise up against him, and put him to death? Who would conceive too, that this should be done, not by ignorant savages, but by the people who had enjoyed the light of revelation, heard his gracious instructions, beheld his bright example, and received the benefit of his miraculous exertions: yea, that it should be done too, not by the inconsiderate vulgar, but by the Rulers themselves, and by the Priests and Ministers of God's sanctuary? This shews what human nature itself is, even under the greatest possible advantages: and humiliating is the picture which it exhibits to us.

But *the desert* also of the world is manifested to us in the death of Christ: for Christ suffered the penalty due to sin: "to redeem us from the curse of the law, he became a curse:" and all the misery that he endured both in body and soul as our surety and substitute, was our deserved portion. He indeed, by reason of his office, could endure it but for a time: but the soul that perishes in sin, must endure it to all eternity. Death, which to him was the period of his release, will be to the condemned soul the commencement of its sorrows, of sorrows that shall endure to all eternity. The hidings of God's face and the sense of his wrath will be coexistent with the soul itself.]

2. The prince thereof would be cast out—

[Satan is called the prince, and the god, of this world, because he exercises an universal government over men who are his willing subjects[a]. That which has given him this power, is *sin*: on account of *sin*, God has delivered men into his hands as their jailor and their executioner. But Jesus Christ has "finished transgression and made an end of sin, and

[a] Eph. ii. 2. 2 Cor. iv. 4. 2 Tim. ii. 26.

and brought in everlasting righteousness;" and has thus rescued from the hands of Satan a countless multitude, who shall be eternal monuments of his electing love and his redeeming power. Whilst yet he hanged on the cross, the Lord Jesus "bruised the serpent's head [b];" yea, "he spoiled principalities and powers, triumphing over them openly upon the cross [c]." At that moment did "Satan fall from heaven as lightning:" and though he still retains a sway over the children of disobedience, yet is he forced continually to give up his vassals to the Lord Jesus, and is made to flee from those [d] whom he lately "led captive at his will." Moreover, the time is shortly coming, (yea, in the Divine purpose it was, as it were, then present,) when he shall be bound in chains of everlasting darkness, and be cast into that "lake of fire" which has from the beginning been "prepared for him and for his angels."]

Next, our Lord predicts,

II. The triumphs of his grace—

By being "lifted up from the earth" was meant, his crucifixion. The expression refers to the lifting up the brazen serpent in the wilderness, which was a type and emblem of the death of Christ [e]. The Evangelist himself tells us, that our Lord intended to intimate the peculiar kind of death which he was to suffer: and the people themselves understood him as speaking of his removal from them by death [f]. Nor did his words convey the idea of uncertainty, which seems intimated in our translation: the event was fixed in the Divine counsels from all eternity; and he spoke of it as certainly to be accomplished [g].

Here then are two things to be noted;

1. The event predicted—

[Christ will "draw all men to himself:" He is that "Shiloh, to whom the gathering of the people should be;" and we see on the day of Pentecost the commencement of this great and glorious work. Would we understand precisely the import of the expression, there we behold it exemplified in the clearest view——— We must not indeed imagine that every individual of mankind will be drawn to Christ; for in every age many have rejected him: but some of all nations, professions, and characters, shall be drawn to him; and

[b] Gen. iii. 15. [c] Col. ii. 15. [d] Jam. iv. 7.
[e] Compare Numb. xxi. 8, 9. with John iii. 14, 15.
[f] ver. 33, 34. [g] ἐὰν should be "*when*," and not "*if*."

and at last shall be found a multitude that no man can number[h]———]

2. The manner in which it shall be accomplished—

[Men are not drawn to him like stocks and stones, but in a way consistent with the perfect exercise of their own free will. The power indeed is Christ's; and it is exerted with effect: but it is made effectual,—

First, *by shewing men their need of him.*—The eyes of all the wounded Israelites were drawn to the brazen serpent in the wilderness: they felt that they were dying of their wounds; they knew that no human efforts could heal them; and they were assured that a sight of that brazen serpent would effect their cure. This attraction was sufficient: they looked and were healed. Thus the jailor saw his own perishing condition, and asked, "What shall I do to be saved?" and was glad to embrace the Saviour proposed to him[i]. This is universally the first operation of Christ's victorious grace.

Next, he draws men *by the attractive influences of his grace.*—Because men know not how the Holy Spirit works upon the souls of men, they are ready to doubt, or even deny, his operations. But who doubts the agency of the wind? yet no man knows whence it comes, or whither it goes. It is visible in its effects; and therefore its operation is acknowledged, notwithstanding it is involved in the deepest mystery. Why then should the operation of the Holy Spirit be doubted, merely because *the mode* of his agency is not understood[k]? Were it possible to question the evidence of our senses, we should deny the virtue of the loadstone, and represent any one as weak or wicked who should profess to believe it. But we behold its effects; and our incredulity is vanquished. So then must we confess the agency of the Holy Spirit upon the souls of men, though we cannot comprehend every thing respecting it. Our Lord has told us, that "no man can come unto him, except the Father draw him[l]:" and the Psalmist affirms, that God makes us "willing in the day of his power[m]." It is sufficient for us to know, that he draws us rationally, "with the cords of a man, and with the bands of love."

Lastly, he draws men *by discovering to them the wonders of his love.*—Let but a glimpse of his incomprehensible love be seen, and every thing in the whole creation will be darkened: just as a view of the meridian sun renders every other object invisible. Paul tells us, that "the love of Christ constrained him:" it carried him away like a mighty torrent: nor will the soul of any man who feels it be either able or desirous to withstand its influence. As well might the angels in heaven be

[h] Dan. vii. 13, 14. [i] Acts xvi. 30, 31. [k] John iii. 8.
[l] John vi. 44. [m] Ps. cx. 3.

be averse to serve their God, as the man that has tasted of redeeming love.

In this way then does the grace of Christ prevail; and in this way shall it triumph to the ends of the earth.]

APPLICATION:

1. Seek to experience the attractions of his grace—

[Nothing under heaven is so desirable as this ——— Say then, with the Church of old, "Draw me, and I will run after thee[n]" ———]

2. Fear not the counteracting influence of men or devils—

[Men may oppose you, and vaunt themselves against you: but they are already "judged" by the word of God; and, if they repent not, they shall be judged by the same at the tribunal of their God. If they do not themselves become such despised creatures as they esteem you to be, they will ere long "awake to shame and everlasting contempt."

Satan too may harass you: but he is a vanquished enemy: yea, he too "is judged[o]:" and though, "as a roaring lion, he seeketh to devour you," you are provided with armour, whereby you may withstand him[p]; and you have the promise of God, that "he shall be shortly bruised under your feet[q]" ———]

[n] Cant. i. 4. [o] John xvi. 11.
[p] Eph. vi. 11—13. [q] Rom. xvi. 20.

DCCCXXI.

THE DANGER OF LOVING THE PRAISE OF MEN.

John xii. 42, 43. *Nevertheless among the chief rulers also many believed on him; but because of the Pharisees they did not confess him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue: for they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God.*

IT seems astonishing to those who have ever considered the evidences of Christianity, that any one should hesitate to embrace it, or to acknowledge any one of its fundamental truths. But reason is by no means a certain guide, even in the things which come within its proper and legitimate sphere: it is too frequently biassed in its decisions, even when the person himself is unconscious of any undue influence upon his mind. Evidence does not carry the same conviction to all: one is persuaded, whilst another

another doubts: the prejudices and passions of mankind operate to a great extent, and often leave demonstration itself almost without effect. Hence we find, that all the credentials with which our Lord confirmed his divine mission, were insufficient to produce conviction on the minds of many: as it is said, "Though he had done so many miracles before them, yet they believed not on him[a]." But by this the Scriptures themselves were fulfilled: for "Isaiah had said, Who hath believed our report; and to whom hath the arm of the Lord been revealed?" Yea, he had also declared, that on account of the perverseness and obstinacy with which many resisted the evidence set before them, they should be given over to judicial blindness and obduracy, so as to be incapable of estimating truth aright, or of embracing it when proposed to them[b]. Even when reason is convinced, it does not always carry the affections along with it; but is often constrained to yield to the superior influence of some predominant lust. Thus it was with those spoken of in our text; who believed indeed that Christ was the true Messiah, yet could not find in their hearts to acknowledge him in that character.

We propose to consider,

I. The conduct they pursued—

They had seen the miracles of our Lord, and were persuaded that he was the person spoken of in the Prophets: yet, because the Pharisees had agreed to excommunicate any who should receive him as the Messiah, they dared not to confess him openly. Now this conduct was exceeding sinful. Of its constituent evils we may notice,

1. The disingenuousness—

[The use of knowledge is to direct our ways: for the sake of our practice therefore we should be careful to acquire just sentiments. If our opinions be doubtful, we should try them; if erroneous, renounce them; if true, we should regulate our lives according to them. To act contrary to the convictions of our mind is unworthy of a rational Being. We all know in what a contemptible light that man appears, who for

[a] ver. 37. [b] ver. 38—40.

for the sake of human applause pretends to religion, whilst the world and sin are predominant in his heart: and equally contemptible is he, who, with the knowledge of the truth in his head, is deterred by the fear of man from yielding to its influence. Indeed the latter species of dissimulation seems the worse of the two, inasmuch as to disclaim what is good is worse than to express an approbation of it. At all events, it is marked with a decisive testimony of God's abhorrence; "To him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin[c]."]

2. The ingratitude—

[The gift of God's only dear Son to die for us is the greatest which God himself could bestow upon us: for from *that* the Apostle infers the unquestionable willingness of God to give us all other things, seeing that all other things together are not to be compared with that[d]. Now to know that God has bestowed that gift upon us, and yet profess to disbelieve it, is the basest ingratitude that can be imagined ——— And if it be ingratitude towards the Father, so is it also towards the Lord Jesus Christ himself, who voluntarily undertook the great work of our redemption. Reflect a moment on this: think of his pitying our undone condition, and leaving the bosom of his Father, in order that he might assume our nature, and die in our stead ——— What incomprehensible love was this! and what a base wretch must he be, who, believing that Christ has so loved him as to give himself for him, is afraid to confess it openly! To all such persons, well may that indignant expostulation be applied, "Do ye thus requite the Lord, O foolish people, and unwise[e]?"]

3. The impiety—

[Wherein can any man be guilty of more flagrant rebellion against God, than in *knowingly* and *deliberately* rejecting his dear Son? The command of God respecting the submitting to his Son is positive, and enforced with a very awful menace[f]. What an act of defiance then is he guilty of, who against the convictions of his own conscience rejects him! What cruelty also is he guilty of towards his fellow-creatures! Men are influenced greatly by example, especially by the example of those in higher life: the lower classes are ready to suppose that the rich and learned must know better than they, and to embrace or reject sentiments on the authority of *their* opinions. Hence the timid dissembler is the means of deceiving many souls; and involves himself in the double guilt of destroying others together with himself. The man who

[c] Jam. iv. 17. [d] Rom. viii. 32. [e] Deut. xxxii. 6.
[f] Deut. xviii. 18, 19. with Acts iii. 22, 23.

who rejects Christ for want of conviction, will "be beaten with few stripes;" but the man who rejects him contrary to his convictions, will "be beaten with many stripes[g]:" the one "dashes himself against a rock that will break his bones;" the other will have "that rock fall upon him, which will grind him to powder[h]."]

That we may be able to account for such strange conduct, let us consider,

II. The principle by which they were actuated—

They acted from a regard for the good opinion of men: but the praise of men runs not in the same channel with the praise of God[hh]; and they unhappily gave that the preference. Now this love of man's applause is,

1. A common principle—

[The moment that we begin to be impressed with a sense of eternal things, we begin to consider, what men will say, if we betray our feelings to the world. Though we should have never paid much attention to the sentiments of others before, we shall now feel the emotions of fear and shame: we shall contrive how we may reconcile the performance of our duties with a conformity to the customs and habits of the world; and shall often strain our conscience to make compliances with the world, in order to escape reproach on account of our singularity. It may be thought that persons who move in a higher sphere should have learned to divest themselves of this principle; but the higher any men are in society, the more they are influenced by the opinions of the world: they set a higher value on man's applause, and feel conscious that their actions are more open to remark. They of whom our text speaks, were "chief rulers:" they conceived that they had much to lose; and they well knew that their rank would not screen them from the assaults of religious intolerance. They might have indulged *vices* with impunity; those would have been connived at, even by Pharisees themselves; but *piety* in them would have been an unpardonable offence, which the very refuse of the people would have been forward to resent. But, though this principle is peculiarly operative on the great, it is not confined to them: we all feel it working in our own bosoms, and have need to be on our guard against its malignant influence.]

2. A foolish principle—

[What can the applause of man do for us? it is a mere breath of air, that vanishes in a moment: but the approbation of

[g] Luke xii. 47, 48. [h] Luke xx. 17, 18. [hh] Rom. ii. 29.

of God is of incalculable importance, since according to that will our eternal state be fixed. To many, the choice of Moses would appear unwise: to refuse the first honours of the Egyptian court, and participate rather in the afflictions of the oppressed Israelites! to "esteem the reproach of Christ as riches, yea as greater riches than all the treasures of Egypt[i]!" this might be regarded as folly by the ignorant Egyptians; but to us who know how to appreciate such conduct, it appears an act of consummate wisdom. Look at the Rulers of whom we are speaking: suppose that all the consequences which they dreaded had come upon them; what would the anathemas of men have been, in comparison of God's displeasure? and what an expulsion from the synagogue, in comparison of a rejection from heaven? If the whole world cannot compensate for the loss of a soul, surely they must be fools indeed who barter away their souls for the breath of man's applause.]

3. A fatal principle—

[God himself has told us, that it is absolutely incompatible with saving faith; "How can ye believe, who receive honour one of another, and seek not the honour that cometh of God only[k]?" And we may appeal to all, whether it does not chill every devout affection, and impede the exercise of every Christian grace? What its ultimate effect will be, our blessed Lord has warned us; "If we confess him, he will confess us; but if we are ashamed of him and deny him, he also will be ashamed of us, and deny us, when he cometh in the glory of his Father with his holy angels[l]."]

ADDRESS,

1. The secret and timid disciples—

[We do not put you all upon a level; for even where the outward conduct is the same, the inward principle may be widely different. Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea were not so open in their acknowledgment of Christ as they should have been[m]; but, when a necessity arose for making known their sentiments, they rose to the occasion, and avowed their attachment to him more boldly than the Apostles themselves. We mean not to express any approbation of their previous timidity; but intimate, that an essential difference may be found, where none externally appears; and that God may have his "hidden ones" even among those who are as yet too much entangled by prudential considerations. It is not however by such examples that we are to regulate our conduct. Our duty is clear: the heart and the mouth are to be

[i] Heb. xi. 24—26. [k] John v. 44. Gal. i. 10. [l] Mark viii. 38.
[m] John iii. 2. & xix. 38.

be alike consecrated unto God, the one to exercise faith on Christ, the other to confess him to the world: and as the mouth without the heart will be an unacceptable offering to the Lord, so also will the heart without the mouth[n].]

2. Those who are suffering for confessing him—

[We are far from despising the approbation of men; but we account it of no value, any longer than it can be enjoyed with a good conscience. That in which alone we are materially interested is, the plaudit of our God: and if only he say to us, "Well done, good and faithful servants," we need not be concerned, whatever may have been the judgment of men concerning us. Are any of you reproached for the sake of Christ; be not grieved, but rather rejoice[o]; for "it turns unto you for a testimony[p]." Great is the encouragement which God himself affords you in his word[q]; and glorious is the prospect that awaits you at your departure hence[r]. Be strong then, and of good courage; knowing, that if your faith be subjected to heavy trials at the present, "it shall be to praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ[s]."]

[n] Rom. x. 8—10. [o] 1 Pet. iv. 14. [p] Luke xxi. 13.
[q] Isai. li. 7, 8. [r] Isai. lxvi. 5. [s] 1 Pet. i. 7.

DCCCXXII.

PRACTICAL RELIGION ENFORCED.

John xiii. 17. *If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them.*

SO little was the virtue of humility understood among the Heathen, that neither the Greeks nor Romans had a word whereby to express the idea. The lowliness of mind and poverty of spirit which we admire as the summit of Christian excellence, they would have accounted meanness and pusillanimity. But our blessed Lord has instructed us in a far clearer manner than the philosophers of old could do, and has illustrated every one of his instructions by his own example. The act of condescension that is recorded in the chapter before us, very strongly exemplifies the virtue of which we are speaking: though Jesus was the Lord both of heaven and earth, and his Disciples were no higher than poor fishermen, he made himself

himself their servant, and performed for them the meanest office, even that of washing their feet: and then told them that such was the spirit which he would have them cultivate, and such the conduct he would have them pursue towards all their fellow-disciples. He declared, moreover, that such views of Christian excellence, attended with a corresponding practice, would prove to them a source of the richest happiness.

We shall not however confine our views to this particular virtue; but shall take occasion from the words of our text to point out, in a more general manner, the connexion between "knowing and doing" the will of God. We shall shew,

I. Their worthlessness when separate—

As for doing, without knowing, the will of God, that is impossible; since knowledge is, and must be, the foundation of all practice. No act can be a religious act, unless it be done with a direct reference to the will of God ordering and directing it to be done. But knowledge may exist without practice: but when it does so, it is altogether worthless.

1. It has no intrinsic excellence—

[The devils have knowledge in common with us, and probably to a far greater extent: but do they possess any thing that is truly good? *Virtue* is good, even though it reside only in the mind, and have no scope for exercise; but *knowledge*, when considered without reference to practice, is as empty and worthless as ignorance itself.]

2. It is productive of no good—

[The science of astronomy, and the knowledge of the magnet, are among the most useful of human attainments: but of what use would they be, if not applied to practical purposes? In the same manner, the knowledge of medicine would never benefit any one, if it were not improved for the healing or preventing of disorders. Thus it is also with respect to divine knowledge. We may be able to delineate all the perfections of God, to trace all the ways of his providence, and to open all the wonders of redemption; we may be able to descant upon virtue, in all its bearings and relations; yea, as the Apostle says, we may "understand all mysteries and

and all knowledge;" and what are we the better for it all, or what good do we effect by it, if it float only upon the mind, and never operate upon our life and conversation? We are only "as sounding brass or as tinkling cymbals[a]." If it be said, that, by communicating our knowledge, we may influence others; *this* only amounts to what we are insisting on, that knowledge is of use only in reference to practice; and, that it then only does good, when it stirs men up to a suitable improvement of it.]

3. It only aggravates our condemnation—

[We are assured, that "to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin[b]." Exactly as much good therefore as "*sin*" does us, so much does unimproved knowledge. Knowledge is a talent, of which we are to give an account: and "to whom much is given, of him will the more be required." The man who knew his Lord's will, and did it not, was beaten with many stripes; while the ignorant offender was beaten with comparatively few[c]. Thus shall we find it in the day of judgment. If, on the one hand, unavoidable ignorance will be considered as an extenuation of our guilt, so, on the other hand, will unsanctified knowledge prove a fearful aggravation of it.]

We would not, however, depreciate either knowledge or practice; but rather point out,

II. Their excellence when combined—

When connected with each other as the root and the fruit, they have an efficacy,

1. To please God—

[The fruits of righteousness that spring from an enlightened mind, are truly acceptable to God[d]. They answer the end for which he originally gave us to his Son[e], and for which his Son laid down his life[f]. There is not any one act that can flow from just views of ourselves and of Christ, which God will not behold with complacency, and accept with joy[g].]

2. To bring comfort into the soul—

[Works of piety are like the incense which, when offered by the priest, not only honoured God, but also regaled the offerer. It is truly said, (though many who admire the expression have very inadequate notions of its import,) that religion's "ways are ways of pleasantness and peace," and that "in keeping God's commandments there is great reward." Who ever set himself to serve and honour God, without finding that

[a] 1 Cor. xiii. 1, 2. [b] Jam. iv. 17. [c] Luke xii. 47, 48.
[d] Heb. xiii. 16. 1 Pet. ii. 5. [e] Eph. i. 4. & ii. 10.
[f] Tit. ii. 14. [g] Matt. x. 42. Jer. ix. 24.

that "the work of righteousness was peace, and the effect of righteousness was quietness and assurance for ever?" It cannot fail but that those who abound in the exercise of virtue, must have the testimony of their own consciences respecting it; and wherever that is, there must be a never-failing source of joy and peace [h].]

3. To embolden us in reference to the day of judgment—

That there is no *merit* in our works is certain: and if we were to found our hopes of acceptance with God upon them as meritorious, we should delude ourselves to our eternal ruin. Nevertheless we are authorized to expect that God will deal with us *according to* our works: and, if we have the testimony of our own consciences that it is our endeavour to "walk worthy of God unto all pleasing," we may "assure our hearts before him," and "have confidence towards him" in reference to his future judgment [i]. Knowing in our own souls that we have fought a good fight and kept the faith, we may say without doubt or fear, "Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me [k]."]

4. To augment our everlasting happiness—

[Who need be told, that men will be rewarded in proportion to their improvement of their talents [l]? This is so plain a truth, that it cannot be denied; and so encouraging a truth, that it ought not to be concealed. A life of holiness is even now recompensed by the richest consolations; but its full value will be known only in heaven.]

From this subject we shall take occasion to,

1. Condole with the ignorant—

[We have before observed, that knowledge is the parent of all acceptable obedience. What then must be your state while you are ignorant of those great things which belong unto your peace? God himself has told you, that you will find "no favour" at his hands [m], but will inevitably and eternally perish [n]. Do but reflect on the condition of a soul that finds "no favour" at the hands of an angry God: surely "better were it for that person that he had never been born."]

2. Counsel the enlightened—

[Value not yourselves upon your knowledge, if you have not a practice suitable to it: for, it is "not the hearer of the law that is just before God, but the doers of the law shall be justified."

[h] 2 Cor. i. 12.
[i] 1 John iii. 18—21. & iv. 17.
[k] 2 Tim. iv. 7, 8.
[l] Luke xiv. 14. & xix. 16, 17. 1 Cor. iii. 8.
[m] Isai. xxvii. 11.
[n] Hos. iv. 6.

justified[o]." You may say, "Lord, Lord," and profess to have known and served him in many things; but you can never enter into the kingdom of heaven, if you have not cheerfully and unreservedly performed his will[p]. Take care therefore that you "be not hearers only of his word, deceiving your own selves; but be doers of it also; for then only shall ye be blessed in your deed[q]."]

3. Congratulate the practical Christian—

["Happy are ye," God himself being witness. Every prominent feature of your character has been mentioned by our Lord as a distinct and certain ground of blessedness[r]. You are fitly "compared to a wise man who built his house upon a rock[s]." Compare the difference between such a man, and a foolish man that builds his house upon the sand: and you will then see your own happiness in a just point of view. Hold on then in this good way; and "as you have learned how to walk and to please God, see that ye abound more and more[t]."]

[o] Rom. ii. 13. [p] Matt. vii. 21, 23. [q] Jam. i. 22—25.
[r] Matt. v. 3—12. [s] Matt. vii. 24—27. [t] 1 Thess. iv. 1.

DCCCXXIII.

FAITH IN CHRIST AN ANTIDOTE TO ALL TROUBLE.

John xiv. 1. *Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God; believe also in me.*

AS God is eminently distinguished by that character, "The Comforter of all them that are cast down," so did Jesus evince his title to it during the whole time of his sojourning on earth: there was no distress which he did not remove from those who made their application to him; and not unfrequently did he anticipate the wants, which the unbelief or ignorance of his followers made them unable to express. He had now been revealing to his Disciples the things which were speedily to be accomplished: and, perceiving that they were greatly dejected by the prospect before them, he encouraged them in the words which we have read; "Let not your hearts be troubled:" and then he prescribed an antidote, sufficient to dispel all their fears: "Ye believe in God; believe also in me."

In discoursing on these words, we shall shew,

I. The

I. The troubles which he taught them to expect—

There were three in particular which seemed most to affect them;

1. Their bereavement of his presence—

[This, if it had been only to a remote quarter of the globe, or after the manner of Elijah's departure, would have greatly depressed their minds; because of the love he had manifested towards them, and their entire dependence on him for instruction and support———but to have him withdrawn from them by cruel sufferings and an ignominious death, was distressing beyond measure; so that the very thought of it filled them with the deepest concern———]

2. The disappointment of all their worldly hopes—

[They had supposed he was about to establish an earthly kingdom, and that they should be exalted to situations of great dignity. But when they heard, that, instead of reigning over other nations, he was to be rejected by his own; and that, instead of elevating them to posts of honour, he himself was to die upon a cross; they knew not how to reconcile these things with his former professions, or how to bear the shame which such a disappointment would unavoidably occasion———]

3. The persecutions they were to meet with from an ungodly world—

[Hitherto they had been screened from persecution, their Lord and Master having borne the brunt of it in his own person: but now they understood that they were to drink of his cup, and to endure all manner of sufferings, and death itself, after his example. This excited painful apprehensions in their minds, and caused them the most serious disquietude———]

What means he used to dissipate their fears, will be found in,

II. The remedy he proposed—

The verbs in our text may be taken either imperatively or indicatively; and many think it would be better to construe both of them alike: but the spirit of the passage seems best preserved in our tranlation; which acknowledges, that they *do* believe in God the Father, and exhorts them to place the same confidence in him as in the Father. They now thought they should lose him entirely and for ever.

To

To rectify this error, he enjoins them, notwithstanding his removal from them, to believe in him,

1. As present with them in their trials—

[Though he would not be present to the eye of sense, he would be really nigh to them on all occasions. Wherever they should be, there would be no bar to his admission to their souls: he would come and visit them, and dwell in them, and manifest himself to them, as he would not unto the world. This would be a far greater blessing to them than his bodily presence; so that they had no reason to regret his apparent withdrawment from them.]

2. As interested in their welfare—

[They had never found him indifferent about any thing that related to them: nor would he forget them after he should have been taken from them into heaven: on the contrary, he was going thither to prepare mansions for them; and he would still enter into all their concerns, sympathizing with them in their afflictions, and regarding every thing that should be done to them as done immediately to himself. If any should give them a cup of cold water only, he would acknowledge it as an obligation conferred on him; and, if any should presume to touch them in a way of injury, *he* would resent it as if they "touched the apple of *his* eye."]

3. As sufficient for their support—

[They had seen what wonders he had wrought during his continuance amongst them: and they must not imagine, that, because he offered up his soul a sacrifice for sin, he was therefore deprived of his power to perform them: for though he would, in appearance, be crucified through weakness, he did really possess all power in heaven and in earth. They might still look to him for the relief of every want, and support in every trial; and they should assuredly find his grace sufficient for them.]

4. As coming again to recompense all that they might endure for his sake—

[He had told them, that he would come again, and *that* too in all the glory of his Father, with myriads of attendant angels, to judge the world. They need not therefore be anxious about any present trials, since he pledged himself to remember all that they should do or suffer for him, and richly compensate their fidelity to him.

These were subjects on which he had often conversed familiarly with them: and if only they would give him credit for the accomplishment of his promises, they might discard their fears, and be of good comfort.]

It

It will be not unprofitable to consider more distinctly,

III. The sufficiency of this remedy to dispel all anxiety from their minds—

Faith in Christ is a perfect antidote against troubles of every kind. Faith has respect to him in all his glorious offices and characters:

1. As the Saviour of the soul—

[What has that man to do with fear or trouble, who sees all his iniquities purged away by the blood of Jesus, and his soul accepted before God?———If he forget these things, he may be cast down by earthly trials: but if he keep this steadily in view, the sufferings of time will be of no account in his eyes: he will feel that he has ground for nothing but unbounded and incessant joy———]

2. As the Governor of the Universe—

[Who that sees how perfectly every thing is under the controul of Jesus, will give way to fear or grief? Not a sparrow falls, nor a hair of our head can be touched, without him: and, if he suffer any injury to be inflicted on us, he can overrule it so as to convert it into the greatest benefit. What then have we to do, but to let him work his own will, and to expect that all things shall work together for our good?———]

3. As the head of his people—

[He is to all his people the head of vital influence; and will he forget to communicate what is necessary for the welfare of his members? We are weak; and our enemies are mighty: but is that any ground for fear, whilst we remember whose members we are? Can we not do all things through Christ strengthening us?———]

4. As the Judge of quick and dead—

[The distribution of rewards and punishments is committed unto him; and he has told us what sentence he will pronounce on all his faithful people. And will not that word, "Come ye blessed," or that, "Well done good and faithful servant," richly repay all that we can do or suffer for him in this world? Can we survey the thrones of glory he has prepared for us, and be afraid of the trials that await us here?———]

BEHOLD then,

1. The happiness of Believers—

[They *may*, they *must*, have their trials; and whilst they possess the feelings of men, they will find some trials grievous

to

to be borne: but they neither have, nor can have, any cause for anxious fear: whilst God is for them, none can be against them. Let them therefore "be careful for nothing," but "cast all their care on Him who careth for them."]

2. The misery of unbelievers—

[Where has God said to *them*, "Let not your hearts be troubled?" No such word can be found in all the Sacred Volume. They have need of continual fear and terror: for, what refuge have they, whilst they are not united unto Christ by faith? Whither can they go under the trials of this life? and what consolation can they have in the prospect of eternity? Better were it, if they die in such a state, that they had never been born. Hear then what Jesus says to you: Look unto ME, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth; for I am God; and besides me there is none else. His address, in the text, is a proof of his Godhead, and consequently of his sufficiency to save all that come unto God by him.]

DCCCXXIV.

CHRIST ENGAGES TO ANSWER PRAYER.

John xiv. 13, 14. *Whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If ye shall ask any thing in my name, I will do it.*

THE Gospel is properly termed "glad tidings of great joy:" it finds men guilty; and reveals to them a way in which their iniquities may be pardoned: it finds them polluted; and provides means for their restoration to the Divine image: it finds them altogether destitute; and supplies them with every thing that their souls can desire. The words before us are fully decisive on this point: they were addressed, indeed, by our Lord, to his own immediate Disciples only: but they must not be confined to any individuals of any age: they were intended for the whole world. As referring to the persons to whom they were addressed, they may be considered as including a promise of miraculous powers: but, as extending to us, they unequivocally engage that we shall possess all that we pray for, provided we ask for it in Jesus' name.

That

That we may more fully enter into the scope and meaning of them, we will shew,

I. To what extent Jesus will answer prayer—

Our blessed Lord is appointed of the Father to answer prayer—

[It was a part of the reward bestowed on him as Mediator, that he should have the whole universe subjected to his dominion[a]. For this end, every thing, upon his ascension to heaven, was committed into his hands; that as "a Prince" he might subdue his enemies, and as "a Saviour" he might secure the happiness of his believing people[b]. He was in a more especial manner constituted "Head over all things to his Church[c]," and furnished with an inexhaustible fulness of all good[d], that he might communicate to all according to their respective necessities[e]. He *received* gifts himself, *in order that* he might *communicate* them unto men[f]: and he will impart them to all who pray to the Father in his name.]

Nor is there any limit to his bounty in answering it—

[In our own name it is impossible to approach God: he is a holy God; and we are altogether filthy and abominable: and of this our unworthiness we ought to be deeply sensible: but at the same time we should have such a view of Christ's worthiness, as emboldens us to expect the most favourable acceptance with God for his sake. We should come trusting in his sacrifice, and pleading the merit of his blood. This is indispensable in all our addresses at the throne of Grace. We must not think of asking for any thing, but in His name[g]. But if we have a becoming respect to him, we need not be straitened in our requests to God: we may "open our mouths wide, and he will fill them." Of course, a person thus humbled with a sense of his own sinfulnes, and thus exercising faith in the Lord Jesus, will desire nothing but what is agreeable to the Divine will: *that* limit to his prayers he himself will readily assign[h]: he will take the promises as the legitimate standard of his petitions: and, so doing, he needs not be afraid of asking too much: the repeated declarations of Christ shall be literally fulfilled: "*Whatsoever* he asks, he shall have[i]:" yea, he shall have "exceeding abundantly above all

[a] Phil. ii. 6—11. [b] Acts v. 31. [c] Eph. i. 21.
[d] Col. i. 19. [e] John i. 16. Eph. i. 22.
[f] Compare Ps. lxviii. 18. with the Apostle's citation of it, Eph. iv. 8.
[g] This is twice mentioned in the text; and frequently elsewhere. See John xv. 16. & xvi. 23, 24, 26.
[h] 1 John v. 14.
[i] Compare John xv. 7. & Matt. xxi. 22. with the text.

all that he can ask or think[k]:" nothing can be so great, but it shall be granted to him; nothing so small, but he shall be heard concerning it. Of this we have repeated assurances from our Lord in the words before us: "*Whatsoever* ye shall ask, that *will* I do: if ye shall ask *any thing*, I *will* do it."]

Of the accomplishment of these promises we have the strongest pledge, when he tells us,

II. For what end he will answer it—

The end for which Jesus left the bosom of the Father was to do his Father's will[l]: and during the whole time of his sojourning on earth, he invariably sought, not his own glory, but the glory of Him that sent him[m]: and in the last prayer he offered with his Disciples, he desired only to be glorified himself, that he might thereby advance the Father's glory[n]. This same end does he keep in view in answering the prayers that are offered in his name.

1. The effect of his answers is, that his Father is glorified—

[See what effects were produced by the miraculous powers which he bestowed on his Apostles: multitudes were converted by their ministry: the empire of sin and Satan was weakened: the authority of God was established over the hearts of men: and all the perfections of the Father were magnified and adored. Similar effects are produced by every communication of his grace to the souls of men; who are thereby "turned from darkness unto light, and from the power of Satan unto God." Only trace the change that is wrought in the heart and life of any individual, when the Spirit of God works effectually in his soul, and it will instantly appear how greatly the honour of God is advanced by the answers which our Saviour gives to the prayers of men———]

2. The circumstance of the prayers being answered by *him* tends also to the glory of God the Father—

[The *power* of God would appear equally if the prayers were answered by the Father: but not so his other perfections: they are more eminently displayed by that office being vested in the Lord Jesus. By that the *justice* and *holiness* of the Father are exalted; inasmuch as men are thereby taught, that God cannot accept a sinner, if coming in his own name, nor reject him, if coming in the name

[k] Eph. iii. 20. [l] Ps. xl. 7, 8. [m] John v. 30. & viii. 50.
[n] John xvii. 1.

name of Jesus: the holiness of God prohibiting all access to him, except through a Mediator; and the justice of God withholding from none the blessings which have been purchased for them by the Saviour's blood. By that also the *love* and *mercy* of God are magnified; in that, when there was no possibility of salvation to our fallen race if left to themselves, God gave his only-begotten Son to obtain salvation for them, and to impart it to them. By that too are the *truth* and *faithfulness* of God displayed; because, the promises being given us only *in* Christ Jesus[o], the accomplishment of them *by* Christ is an evidence that "with God there is no variableness, neither shadow of turning." If it should be thought by any that the delegation of this power to Christ derogates from the honour of the Father, let him know, that God the Father accounts himself then alone honoured, when equal honour is given to his co-equal, co-eternal Son[p].]

Hence then we may SEE,

1. Whence it is that so few persons receive answers to prayer—

[Many offer prayers, both in public and private; but they do not pray with that humility, or that faith, which are necessary to procure an answer from God. They do not feel that deep consciousness of their own vileness that makes a Mediator necessary: though they may notionally acknowledge Christ as their Saviour, they do not really feel the impossibility of coming to an holy God in their own name: and consequently they do not depend so entirely on the merits of Christ as the only ground of their hopes; nor do they plead those merits for the acceptance of their prayers, as they ought: hence it is that the Father does not hear their prayers; and that the Lord Jesus does not answer them. If then we would really experience the truth contained in our text, let us seek help from God, that we may be enabled to approach him in that way which alone will prevail for our eternal good ———Let us also draw nigh to him with that frequency, and delight, which a firm belief in our Saviour's veracity must produce.]

2. What *they* should attend to who have received answers to prayers—

[That which is Christ's end in answering prayer, ought to be our end when an answer has been obtained; we should seek to glorify our heavenly Father. Do we ask, "How can we glorify him?" I answer, "In bringing forth much fruit[q]." Holy tempers, and a life devoted to the service of God, are the

[o] 2 Cor. i. 20. Gal. iii. 17. [p] Phil. i. 11. John v. 22, 23.
[q] John xv. 8.

the proper fruits of grace received. As a seal stamps its own image on the wax, so does the sealing of the Spirit impress the Divine image on the soul. By this we must judge of answers to prayer. It is not by vain conceits, or transient impressions, that we can judge, but by the practical results. "If we have received Christ Jesus the Lord, we must walk in him, rooted and built up in him;" or, in other words, "we must walk as he walked." Where such fruits of prayer are wanting, God is grievously dishonoured: it is only by a conformity to Christ in all his dispositions and actions that we can approve ourselves his disciples. Beware then how you substitute the reveries of enthusiasm for the holiness of the Gospel: "He that doeth righteousness, (as every disciple of Christ must,) is righteous, even as he is righteous."]

DCCCXXV.

OUR LIFE DEPENDENT ON THE LIFE OF CHRIST.

John xiv. 19. *Because I live, ye shall live also.*

AMONGST the various sources of consolation which our Lord opened to his Disciples, to support them under the disappointment that would be occasioned by his death, a very principal one seems to have been, that they themselves would be greatly benefited by his departure: for that he would send to them his Spirit, who should more than supply the want of his bodily presence; and that he himself would more effectually advance their eternal interests than he could do if he were to continue upon earth. He assures them, that though dead as to the body, he would still live; and that, "because he lived, they should live also."

From this declaration of his we shall make two inquiries;

I. What connexion has the life of Christ with his people's life—

Those who are not altogether ignorant of Christ are yet more apt to think of him as a dying, than as a risen Saviour; whereas his life is not at all less connected with our salvation than his death.

His life is the ground and confirmation of all our hopes—

[What

[What do we most wish to be assured of, in reference to Christ? We wish to know, *that he was indeed the Son of God*, and not a common man—*that he was sent of God* on purpose to redeem a ruined world—and *that what he did and suffered for us has been accepted in our behalf*. These are points of infinite importance, and that lie at the foundation of all our hopes. But by the resurrection of Christ they are all clearly and satisfactorily ascertained: "By that he was declared to be the Son of God with power[a]:" by that was the sign, which above all others he himself appealed to in proof of his divine mission, fulfilled[b]: and by that is the acceptance of his sacrifice made known, since the release of our Surety is an undeniable evidence that our debt is paid[c].

Hence the testimony borne by the Apostles to the Resurrection of Christ, was considered as a complete and sufficient proof of every thing that they asserted respecting him.]

It is also a pledge and earnest of all our joys—

[Do we feel happiness in the thought of our being made partakers of eternal life, and in the prospect of a speedy possession of it? Behold him *risen*, him *ascended*, him *seated at the right hand of God*: in what capacity enjoys he all this exaltation? As a mere individual? No: but as the Head and Representative of all his people: in his resurrection, he is "*the first-fruits*," of which there remains a whole harvest to be gathered[d]: in his ascension, he is gone as "*our Forerunner*," "to prepare a place for us[e]:" and even enthroned as he is at the right hand of the Majesty on high, he sits not there alone; for we, though personally on earth, are mystically "made, at this very hour, to *sit with him in heavenly places* in Christ Jesus[f]."

What then is his life, but a pledge of ours, or rather an earnest? since it not only assures to us a future blessedness, but is itself the very commencement of our bliss?]

But the expression in our text intimates, that the life of Christ is not merely *intimately*, but also *inseparably*, connected with the life of his people.

Let us proceed therefore to notice,

II. What security it affords them that they shall live—

Here let it be considered how our Lord is occupied, and what he has engaged to do for his believing people:

1. He

[a] Rom. i. 4. [b] Matt. xii. 38, 40. [c] Rom. iv. 25.
[d] 1 Cor. xv. 20. [e] Heb. vi. 20. John xiv. 2. [f] Eph. ii. 6.

1. He intercedes for them—

[As the high-priest, after offering his sacrifice, went within the veil to sprinkle the blood upon the mercy-seat, and to burn incense before it, so did our Lord ascend to heaven on purpose to complete the work he had begun, and to offer continual intercession for us at the right hand of God. Now we are assured that "him the Father heareth always:" and consequently the benefits of his intercession cannot but be poured out on all his people. Hence there is peculiar stress laid on this act of his, as insuring to us the benefits of his death[g]. His death indeed is represented as making the atonement for our sins, and reconciling us to God; but it is his resurrection to a life of glory in heaven, that completes our justification, and perfects our salvation[h].]

2. He works effectually in them—

[By his Spirit he yet dwells in all his saints[i]: and he has engaged that "his grace shall be sufficient for them," so that the weakest of them all shall be "enabled to do all things through his strength" communicated to them[k]. It is this which renders them invincible: "their life is hid with Christ in God;" yea, "Christ himself is their life;" and therefore, when he shall appear in his glory, they will assuredly appear there with him[l].]

3. He will come at last, and take them to himself—

[When they shall have fought the good fight of faith, and gained the victory over all their spiritual enemies, they will not be forgotten of him: he will send his angels to bear up their spirits to the realms of bliss; and in due time he will restore also their bodies to life; that, in a re-embodied state, they may inherit the kingdom prepared for them. This assurance he gave to his Disciples in the preceding context[m]; and when, by that event, death shall be swallowed up in victory, then will the promise in our text be finally accomplished; and their life of grace will be completed in a life of glory.]

Behold what ENCOURAGEMENT this subject affords to all;

1. To believe on Christ—

[Were Christ unconnected with us in his present state, we might well doubt the expediency of putting our trust in him: but when we are informed that his almighty power is always

[g] Heb. vii. 25. Rom. viii. 34.
[h] Rom. iv 25. & v. 10. & viii. 34.
[i] See ver. 17, 18.
[k] Phil. iv 13.
[l] Col. iii. 3, 4.
[m] ver 3.

always occupied in forwarding our salvation, we should instantly commit ourselves into his hands, and expect from him all that our necessities can require. Do we, as creatures dead in sin, desire life? or, as persons quickened from the dead, do we desire more life? or, being possessed of life, do we desire an assurance that we shall never lose it? Behold, Jesus, who "came that we might have life, and have it more abundantly," meets your case with exactly such a promise as you want[n]. Let me then put the question to you, "Believest thou this?" O beg of God that he would enable you so to do: say, "Lord, I believe; help thou my unbelief!"]

2. To suffer for him—

[Sufferings of some kind you must expect: there is not one of his people but has some cross to bear. You will find too at times that your trials are heavy: but the heavier they are, the more will his power be magnified in you. This thought afforded inexpressible consolation to the apostle Paul[o], and made him even "take pleasure" in his multiplied afflictions[p]. Your enemies think little respecting Christ as actively engaged in behalf of his people: but in you they shall see his power and grace; and, whilst his death is exhibited in your sufferings, his life shall be manifested in your support[q]. Only take the promise in the text, and you need fear nothing.]

3. To press forward for universal holiness—

[You are not called to beat the air, or to engage either in an uncertain or an unproductive contest: you have a living Saviour, that is pledged both to give you the victory, and to reward your conflicts. Will you not then fight? Will you leave a sin unmortified, an enemy unsubdued? Gird you to the combat: put on the whole armour of God: quit yourselves like men: and know assuredly, that "your labour shall not be in vain in the Lord."]

[n] John x. 10. & xi. 25, 26.
[o] 2 Cor. iv. 8—11.
[p] 2 Cor. xii. 9, 10.
[q] See [o].

DCCCXXVI.

OBEDIENCE THE TEST OF OUR LOVE TO CHRIST.

John xiv. 21. *He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father; and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him.*

IT is supposed by many, that to profess an assurance of our acceptance with God is the very height of

of presumption. But, whilst we acknowledge that such a profession may be made very erroneously, and by persons who deceive their own souls, we cannot admit that no such thing as a Scriptural assurance exists: on the contrary, we affirm, that a consciousness of so great a change as takes place in conversion cannot but exist in some degree; and that our blessed Lord has taught all his people to expect it: "In that day ye shall know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you[a]." If indeed such a persuasion were to be entertained without being subjected to any test, then would it be most enthusiastic, and most dangerous: but, if we have an infallible rule whereby to try it, then have we no reason to feel that jealousy respecting it, which so generally prevails. The truth is, that in this very passage where our Lord has sanctioned an assurance of our state, he has established a criterion whereby all our professions must be judged: nor, till our experience has been found to accord with that standard, have we any right to expect the rewards and consolations of his Gospel: "He that, &c."

Now in these words we may see,

I. How to judge of our love to Christ—

We must not imagine that the adoption of certain sentiments, or the joining of ourselves to a particular set of people, or the manifesting of a regard for public or social ordinances, or the having had great exercises of mind in reference to religion, with many hopes or fears, or joys or sorrows, or the feeling a strong confidence about the safety of our own state, are any certain proofs of love to Christ: these things not only may, but often do, exist, where there is no real love to Christ in the soul. There is one mark, and one only, whereby we can form any decided judgment about the states of men; and that is, "By their fruits ye shall know them:" they alone truly love the Lord Jesus Christ, who manifest a due regard for his commandments:

1. Who "have them" in their hearts—

[Those

[a] ver. 20.

[Those who "love the Lord Jesus Christ *in sincerity*," desire a perfect conformity to his mind and will. With this view they study his commandments: they do not read them in a cursory way, but meditate on them, and search into them, and beg of God to open them to their view, and are thankful for any light that may be cast upon them, even though their own conduct should thereby be condemned. Having obtained a deeper insight into them, they treasure up the welcome truth in their minds, and "hide it in their hearts," as a rule of their conduct, "that they may no longer sin against him." "They account not any one of them grievous," but approve of them in their utmost extent, and "pant" after a more entire conformity to them, and long to "stand perfect and complete in all the will of God[b]." They would not willingly have "a thought, that should not be brought into captivity to the obedience of Christ."]

2. Who "keep them" in their lives—

[Those who truly love Christ will be always "walking in the way of his commandments." Do you inquire into their *general* conduct? you will find them "labouring, not so much for the meat that perisheth, as for that which endureth unto everlasting life:" they will "not be taking thought what they shall eat and drink, and be clothed with, as the poor ignorant Gentiles do; but will seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness;" "not laying up treasures upon earth, but laying them up in heaven." In "love to the world and the things thereof, they will form a contrast with the ungodly world[c]."

In like manner, if you inquire into their conduct *under any particular circumstances*, you will know beforehand where to find them: you need only examine the commandments in relation to that subject, and you will know how they will act. You will not expect to find them conceited, selfish, querulous; because they are commanded to "prefer others in honour before themselves;" to "mind, not their own things, but also the things of others;" and "in whatsoever state they are, therewith to be content." Nor will you expect to find them censorious, passionate, unforgiving, or vindictive; because Christ has bidden them "not to judge others," or "to say to any one, Thou fool;" but rather to "turn the left cheek to any one that smites them on the right," and to "forgive him not only seven times, but seventy times seven."

They are not unlike a mariner that is ordered to cruize in a given latitude. There is no visible object in the ocean to which he directs his way; but he consults his chart, and his compass;

[b] Ps. cxix. 127, 128, 131. This last verse beautifully expresses the ardent longing of his soul to be conformed to them.

[c] 1 John ii. 15, 16. Rom. xii. 2.

compass, and the heavenly bodies, and then makes his observations with all the accuracy that he can. The spot is not so defined, but that a difference of opinion may exist respecting its precise situation: but a skilful mariner will not be far wrong; or, if for a moment he be driven by a storm from the place he should occupy, he will be sensible of his departure, and will make every effort to return to his post again as soon as possible. Thus it is with all that truly love Christ: they have in their hands the means of ascertaining the way that they should walk in: and they use those means with diligence, knowing that any considerable and habitual departure from it will be an impeachment of the sincerity of their love. The commandments indeed, especially in circumstances of expediency, are not always so defined, but that there may be room for difference of opinion respecting the precise line of conduct prescribed by them: but, in relation to the spirit in which we should act, they leave nothing doubtful; they are as clear as the light at noon-day; so that, though a difference of opinion may exist, it never can be such as to occasion any great departure from the path of duty: and as a man, who, being ordered to cruise in a northern latitude, should go to the southern hemisphere, and then maintain that he was in his proper place, would be justly deemed unworthy of any credit as a mariner; so the man who justifies himself in the indulgence of any evil tempers, is unworthy of the name of a Christian: a proud Christian, a passionate Christian, a covetous Christian, a lewd Christian, is as much a contradiction in terms, as an infidel, an idolatrous, or a murderous Christian.]

This is the criterion whereby every man must be judged: and though there are imperfections even in the best, yet this on the whole is the true, the manifest, and the uniform character of all who really love Christ: all others, whatever they may be, only deceive their own souls[d].

Our Lord having thus accurately drawn the character of his people, shews us,

II. What to expect, if we do not truly love him—

It is not possible to enlarge our expectations too much, if only we confine them within the promises of God. As surely as we attain this character,

1. We shall possess his favour—

[Much as "he abhors all the workers of iniquity," he will retain no unkind thought towards us: on the contrary, "he will love us," approving our spirit, accepting our services, and "rejoicing

[d] 1 John v. 3. & 1 Cor. vii. 19.

"rejoicing over us to do us good[e]." The Lord Jesus Christ also says, "And I will love you." A love of benevolence he felt towards us when we were yet enemies; but now he will feel a love of complacency, even such a love as shall make him attentive to our every want, our every concern ——— Of course, it must here be supposed, that our obedience to his commandments proceeds from proper principles; not from a desire of establishing a righteousness of our own, but from a grateful sense of his redeeming love, and from a zeal for his glory: if this be not the case, our best efforts will be even hateful both to the Father and to Christ, inasmuch as they are substituted in the place of that atoning blood of Christ, which alone can cleanse us from all sin: but if our obedience be pure in its principle, uniform in its tenor, and impartial in its extent, then shall it surely be accepted for Christ's sake, and be rewarded with the everlasting favour of our God[f].]

2. We shall have the present manifestations of it to our souls—

[There are manifestations of God to the soul, which the world have no idea of. In reading of the word, in prayer, in meditating on the promises, God will take away the veil from our hearts, and discover himself to us, and lift up the light of his countenance upon us, and "shed abroad his love in our hearts." By the communications of his Spirit to us, he will enable us to cry, Abba, Father; he will witness with our spirits that we are his children; he will give us an earnest of our inheritance, even the present foretaste of heaven itself in our souls.

Our Lord, when interrogated by Judas, confirmed this truth by repeated asseverations, and repeatedly also confirmed what he had spoken respecting the character of those to whom these blessings should be vouchsafed[g]. We may be assured therefore, that to expect these manifestations is no presumption; but, on the contrary, they are the proper portion of all who love and serve Christ in sincerity.]

From this subject we may clearly SEE, that religion is,

1. A holy thing—

[That there are those who profess religion and yet grievously dishonour it by their conduct, is a melancholy truth; and that the prejudices of many against religion are hereby greatly strengthened, is also true: but religion is no more accountable for the inconsistencies of those who profess it, than

[e] Jer. xxxii. 41. Zeph. iii. 17. [f] See John xvi. 27. [g] ver. 22—24.

than reason is for the follies of those who pervert it. What is the true tendency of love to Christ, has already appeared: and every one must try his professions by that test.

I would solemnly call upon all those who are habitually violating any one commandment, to remember that all their pretended love to Christ is mere hypocrisy and delusion: and the more confident they are of their own acceptance with him, the more they deceive their own souls[1].

And all who are in a measure shewing forth their faith by their works, I would exhort to abound more and more; that, "making their light to shine more bright, they may constrain all around them to glorify their heavenly Father."]

2. A happy thing—

[As there are unholy, so are there also unhappy, professors of religion. But shall we therefore conclude that Christ will not fulfil his promises to his loving and obedient people; or that there are any circumstances under which his presence with the soul cannot make it happy?]

[1] 1 John ii. 3, 4. Who would have thought that such persons as are here described, exist? Yet they do exist. Compare the concluding words of this passage with the words immediately preceding the text. See also Jam. i. 26. & Matt. vii. 16—23.

DCCCXXVII.

LOVE TO THE BRETHREN.

John xv. 12. *This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you.*

THE law and the Gospel are in perfect unison with each other: the law, *as a covenant*, sends us to the Gospel, that we may obtain mercy with God; and the Gospel sends us back again to the law, *as a rule of life*, that, by obeying its commands, we may honour and glorify our God. The loving our neighbour as ourselves was enjoined by the law, and indeed was a summary of all the duties of the second table[a]. Our blessed Lord, enjoining the same duty from new considerations, calls it "a new commandment," and emphatically *his* commandment; that so we may be led to examine it with stricter attention, and to regard it with deeper reverence: he says, in effect, Labour constantly to fulfil that old commandment

[a] Compare Lev. xix. 18. with Rom. xiii. 8—10. & Gal. v. 14.

ment of the law; and, that you may never want either a directory to guide, or a motive to animate, you in your exertions, take my love to you as the *reason* and *pattern* of your love to each other.

To elucidate his words, we shall shew,

I. How Christ has loved us—

We must, of course, content ourselves with a few hints only of a subject, which has a height and depth, and length and breadth that can never be comprehended, never explored. Consider then the love of Christ to us:

1. How free!

[Who ever did any thing to procure it? It exerted itself towards us long before we had any existence in the world. Who can do any thing *now* to merit it? We deserve to forfeit it every day and hour; but to earn an interest in it is beyond the power of man. We have nothing of our own but sin; and that would be a poor price to pay for the love of Christ. Indeed, if we deny the freeness of his grace, we rob him of the brightest jewel in his crown.]

2. How tender!

[There is not one of his people, however weak and afflicted, whom he does not watch over with more than parental tenderness, "carrying the lambs in his bosom, and gently leading them that are with young." Yes; "we have not an High-priest who cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities:" "in all our afflictions He is afflicted:" if we are stricken by the hand of persecution, He feels the blow[b]: "he that toucheth us, toucheth the apple of His eye." In every possible state he sympathizes with us, as a head with the members, and never fails to succour us with "grace sufficient for us."]

3. How abundant!

[If we regarded only the temporal blessings we receive at his hands, we must confess his love to us to be very abundant. But who can contemplate his unwearied intercessions at the right hand of his Father, or the incessant communications of his Spirit to their souls, and not stand amazed at the exceeding riches of his grace and love? And besides all this, he is "preparing mansions for us in his Father's house," and training us up daily, that we may be counted worthy to inhabit them for ever and ever. Well is his love represented as "passing knowledge[c]!"]

4. How

[b] Acts ix. 4. [c] Eph. iii. 19.

4. How costly!

[Free as his love was to us, it was not exercised by him but at an expense that exceeds all calculation. Before it could operate for our advantage, he must leave his heavenly glory, assume our fallen nature, endure the scoffs and insults of his own creatures, and "pour out his soul unto death" as a sacrifice for sin. And would he pay this amazing price, in order to redeem our souls from death and hell? Yes, he undertook and executed the mighty work; and never drew back till he could say, "It is finished."]

From contemplating this stupendous mystery, let us proceed to inquire,

II. In what respects his love to us is a pattern for our love to each other—

The love which the saints should bear to each other is of a sublime nature, very different from that which they owe to the world around them[d]. To resemble that of Christ to us, it should be,

1. Disinterested—

[Our love to the saints should not be confined to those of the same Church or party, nor should it have respect to any pleasure or advantage that we expect to derive from them; for this is only a refined species of self-love[e]: it should respect them only as children of our heavenly Father, as members of Christ our living Head, and as joint-heirs of the same eternal glory. It should be proportioned to their piety, rather than to any other endowments; and be occupied in advancing their happiness, not only as much as our own, but oftentimes in preference to our own. It was thus that the love of Christ operated towards us; and it is proposed for our imitation more especially in this point of view; "Mind not every one his own things, but every one also the things of others. Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus[f]."]

2. Sympathizing—

[We are all passing through a vale of tears, "born to trouble as the sparks fly upward." Hence we need each other's care and assistance through the whole of our lives. The kindness of friendship is a remedy which God has put within our reach, to enhance our joys and to alleviate our sorrows: we should therefore enter into the concerns of others, and feel them as our own; "weeping with them that weep, and rejoicing with them that rejoice." By this, we

[d] The two are carefully distinguished from each other. Gal. vi. 10. 1 Pet. ii. 17. [e] Matt. v. 46, 47. [f] Phil. ii. 4, 5.

we are told, we shall more especially comply with the injunction in the text; "Bear ye one another's burthens," says the Apostle, "and *so* fulfil the law of Christ[g]."]

3. Beneficent—

[Love must not interest merely the feelings of the mind: it must exert itself in acts correspondent to the occasions on which it is exercised. Is our neighbour distressed? we must relieve him: Is he ignorant? we must instruct him: Is he weak? we must strengthen him: Is he fallen? we must raise him up: Has he shewn some infirmities? we must bear with him. Has he offended us? we must forgive him. Are there any opportunities whatever of doing him good? we must gladly and speedily embrace them. It is in this way also that the Apostle urges us to imitate our Lord and Saviour: "Put on, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, humbleness of mind, meekness, long-suffering; forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, *even as Christ forgave you*, so also do ye[h]."]

4. Self-denying—

[That love which will exert itself only in things that are easy and pleasing to oneself, is not worthy the name of love. A truly Christian affection will lead one to "condescend to men of low estate;" to visit the chambers of the sick; to enter into the dungeon of the prisoner; to cut off some of one's superfluities in order to supply the necessities of others; to do good in return for evil; to expose oneself to the derision of a thoughtless world, in order to be instrumental in turning some of them from the evil of their ways; and "to lay down, if need be, even our own lives for the Brethren." This was the way in which St. Paul manifested his love[i]; and in which we also, after the example of our Lord, are called to manifest ours[k].]

This being the way in which our love may resemble his, we shall shew you,

III. The obligation we are under to follow that pattern—

Our blessed Lord has enjoined a conformity to him in these respects,

1. As an act of obedience to him—

[He does not *recommend* such love as decorous and beneficial, but *commands* it as a duty which he will on no account dispense with. He stamps his own authority upon it; intimating thereby that he will make it a subject of particular

[g] Gal. vi. 2.
[h] Col. iii. 12, 13.
[i] 1 John iii. 16.
[k] Phil. ii. 17, 18.

ticular inquiry in the day of judgment. Indeed the decision at the last day is represented as turning principally upon this point; they who for his sake have abounded in offices of love being made *exclusively* the objects of his favour, while they who have neglected them are marked as objects of his indignation and abhorrence. If therefore we have any regard to his authority, or any dread of his everlasting displeasure, we must see the importance of following the example of his love.]

2. As an evidence of our love to him—

[Having in another place enforced this duty in terms similar to the text, he adds, that the exercise of brotherly love is the distinctive badge of our profession, the habit whereby all his followers must be known[l]. To the same effect his loving and beloved Disciple also speaks, declaring that our profession of love to God is mere hypocrisy without this[m]; and that without this we can have no assurance, no evidence, that we have passed from death unto life[n]. Shall we then at once write '*Hypocrite*' upon our foreheads? Shall we be contented to be ranked with "murderers, who certainly have not eternal life abiding in them[o]?" If not, we must see the necessity of imitating Christ, who "has left us an example that we should follow his steps."]

INFER,

1. How little true religion is there in the world!

[So far is love to the saints from being the common disposition of mankind, that almost all are rather filled with hatred against them: and where candour prevails over the enmity of the human heart so as to subdue its workings, there yet is a total want of that disinterested, sympathizing, beneficent, and self-denying love, which characterizes a true Christian — — —]

2. What reason have even the saints themselves to be ashamed before God!

[Let the most zealous and active Christian compare his love with that of Christ; how poor and defective will his best efforts appear! Alas! alas! how often are things found among professing Christians that are not only defective, but directly contrary to love! Beloved Brethren, let us study more carefully St. Paul's description of love[p]: and above all, let us contemplate more the love of Christ to us: so shall we feel its constraining influence, and be stimulated to the exercise of this delightful duty.]

[l] John xiii. 34, 35. [m] 1 John iv. 20. [n] 1 John iii. 14, 17, 19.
[o] 1 John iii. 15. [p] 1 Cor. xiii.

DCCCXXVIII.

THE DOCTRINE OF ELECTION EXPLAINED.

John xv. 16. *Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you; and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain.*

IT is of great importance to have a just view of the doctrines contained in Scripture. There are many passages which at first sight appear to contradict each other; but they are all true and consistent when properly explained. The assertions respecting the freedom of our will, and our proneness to apostacy, are true, and necessary to excite us to care and watchfulness: nor are those that respect our election of God, and our assured perseverance in his ways, less true, or less conducive to our spiritual welfare. They have a strong tendency to produce in us humility and a dependence on God. All these passages therefore ought to be insisted on in their season. That which now demands our attention is a part of our Lord's farewell address to his Disciples. It naturally leads us to consider,

I. The doctrine of election—

This being frequently misrepresented, it will be proper to state what we mean by the doctrine of election—

[It imports, that "*that we have not chosen God.*" No man by nature does choose him. The carnal mind is enmity against him[a], and prefers the vanities of time and sense before him: nor is any man ever brought to choose him without having discovered much reluctance, and been overcome by the constraining influence of Divine grace[b]. It imports, moreover, that "*God has chosen us.*" He from eternity chose some to life. This choice of his was free and sovereign, without any respect whatever to works either done, or to be done, by us. In due time, God manifests his election, by sending his grace into our hearts: nor does any man differ from another, but in consequence of grace thus derived from God[c]. Hence every saint on earth or in heaven must say "By the grace of God I am what I am[d]."]

The

[a] Rom. viii. 7. [b] Ps. cx. 3. [c] 1 Cor. iv. 7. [d] 1 Cor. xv. 10.

The doctrine thus stated is capable of the fullest proof,

1. From reason—

[God is a Being of infinite perfection. But he could not be independent if the accomplishment of his purposes depended on our free-will; nor omniscient, if he did not know how we should act; nor immutable, because his knowledge must increase with a succession of events[e]. Again, It is ordained, that man shall never have whereof to boast before God[f]. But if the doctrine of election be not true, man may boast that he has made himself to differ[g]. Again, Jesus Christ must have a seed to serve him. But if none are elected of God, it *may* happen that none will choose God; and thus Christ *may* have shed his blood in vain.]

2. From Scripture—

[In *the Old Testament* we find that God had a peculiar people, and that some from among them were chosen by him to particular stations[h]. Nor can any argument be brought against God's election of men to eternal life, which will not be equally valid against the right he has confessedly exercised in choosing them to the enjoyment of the means of grace. *In the New Testament*, we are plainly told that some of the Jews were chosen to special and saving mercies[i]: they were called *in time*, in consequence of having been predestinated *from eternity*[k]. God had no respect to any works of theirs, either done by them, or foreseen by him; but simply to his own eternal purpose[l]. St. Paul not only argues this point at large, but, conceiving that he has fully established it, he lays it down as an incontrovertible truth, that the salvation of every man is entirely owing to the grace and mercy of God[m].]

3. From experience—

[Whence is it that so small a part of the world is evangelized? or that the persons who, according to human appearance, are least likely to receive the Gospel, are still, as in the early ages, the first to embrace it? Whence is it too that all

[e] It is not sufficient to say that He foresees every thing, though he has not fore-ordained it; for if things be uncertain, they cannot be foreseen; and if they be certain, they cannot but be fore-ordained, since the certain operation of every distinct cause must be traced up to the first great Cause of all.

[f] Rom. iii. 27. 1 Cor. i. 31.
[g] Contrary to 1 Cor. iv. 7. before quoted.
[h] Levi to the priesthood, David to the throne, &c,
[i] Rom. xi. 7, 5. [k] Rom. viii. 30.
[l] 2 Tim. i. 9. [m] Rom. ix. 16.

all the godly; not excepting even those who are most prejudiced against the word Election, are yet ready to ascribe their own salvation to the unmerited grace of God? These things strongly corroborate the testimonies of reason and Scripture; and though there are difficulties attending this doctrine, yet are there much greater difficulties attending the denial of it. And since God has affirmed it to be true, we should say to all objectors, Who art thou that repliest against God [n]?]

The principal objection against this doctrine will be obviated, if we consider,

II. The ends to which we are elected—

There is no reason to think this doctrine injurious to morality. Indeed there is no other doctrine that secures morality on so firm a basis—

1. We are chosen expressly to good works—

[Our Lord might refer in part to the labours of his Disciples, and to their consequent success in them. But he certainly had a further view also to the fruits of righteousness which they should bring forth. In this sense his words are applicable to all Believers. God has ordained holiness as the way to heaven [o]——and has appointed the means no less than the end [p]——yea, he has decreed the end to be obtained only in and by the means [q]——Hence the performance of good works is secured by that same decree which secures the salvation of God's elect.]

2. We are chosen also to persevere in them—

[God does not leave us at liberty to return to sin: on the contrary, he will have no pleasure in those who do [r]. He will regard all the righteousness which they have wrought as though it had never been [s]: and their latter end will be worse than their beginning [t]. But against such apostacy God will secure his own elect. He has given them a new heart, that they may fear him *for ever* [u]. He has promised, that their path shall be stedfast [x], and progressive [y]. And every Saint may indulge a humble confidence that it will be so [z].]

ADDRESS,

1. Those who object to this doctrine—

[For argument sake, we will give up the doctrine, and allow

[n] Rom. ix. 20. [o] Heb. xii. 14. Eph ii. 10. Rom. viii. 29.
[p] 1 Pet. i. 2. Eph. i. 4. [q] 2 Thess. ii. 13. [r] Heb. x. 38.
[s] Ezek. xviii. 24. [t] 2 Pet. ii. 20, 21. [u] Jer. xxxii. 39.
[x] Job xvii. 9. [y] Prov. iv. 18. [z] Phil. i. 6.

allow the first choice to arise from ourselves. Have ye then chosen Christ? Have ye chosen him as your almighty Saviour and your rightful Lord? If you think you have, consider how much is implied in such a choice. If you acknowledge you have not, "out of your own mouth shall ye be judged."]

2. Those who doubt their own election—

[You are too apt to perplex yourselves with unprofitable inquiries. You should rather examine whether ye have been called. It is by your vocation that you are to know your election[a]. Keep your evidences of conversion clear, and they will be indisputable proofs that you have been chosen to life.]

3. Those who have good reason to hope that they have been elected of God—

[Never can you sufficiently admire the goodness of God to you. Well may you say, Why was *I* taken, while so many better than myself were left? But at the same time remember to what ye are chosen. Never attempt to separate the end from the means. If ye have this hope, ye are bound to purify yourselves, even as God is pure[b].]

[a] 1 Thess. i. 4, 5. [b] 1 John iii. 3.

DCCCXXIX.

CONSOLATION TO THE PERSECUTED.

John xv. 18—20. *If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you. If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you. Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than the lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you: if they have kept my saying, they will keep yours also.*

WELL might our Lord enjoin his Disciples to love one another; for, if they be not united in affection towards each other, they will in vain look for any love in the world. They are "as sheep in the midst of wolves:" the wolves indeed are kept from devouring now, as they have done in former times; but the disposition to devour still remains in the minds of ungodly men, and the godly are still regarded as their legitimate prey[a]. Our Lord may be considered as

[a] Isai. lix. 15.

as addressing his own immediate Disciples in the first place: but the grounds on which he teaches them to expect hatred from the world, are such as apply equally to all his people in every age; and consequently we may consider the words as addressed to all his followers.

We shall take occasion from them to consider,

I. What it is in Christians that calls forth the enmity of the world—

The reasons usually assigned are, that they are enthusiasts, and hypocrites, and disturbers of the peace of mankind: but the true reasons are those which our Lord assigns in the text, namely,

1. Their election out of the world—

[" The whole world lieth in wickedness," all being equally alienated from God, however they may differ from each other in their moral conduct. But God has from eternity chosen a people, whom he has given to his dear Son, and whom in due time he calls by his grace, and brings out of nature's " darkness into the marvellous light" of his Gospel. These, when called, are made sensible that they owe the change, not to any merit or power in themselves, but altogether to the effectual working of his grace: and they acknowledge thankfully their obligations to him, saying, " By the grace of God I am what I am[aa]."

This acknowledgment is very offensive to the world. They cannot endure to hear of the sovereignty of God: they think that God cannot choose some to be objects of his favour without being unjust to others. Though they cannot but see that God has exercised his sovereignty in every age, in the case of Abraham, for instance, and of Isaac, and of Jacob, and of the Jewish nation, and of those nations that now enjoy the light of his Gospel, yea, in the redemption of fallen man when he never provided such a remedy for the fallen angels, yet they will not allow him to do so now: and every person who ascribes his conversion to the distinguishing grace of God, they consider as actuated by consummate pride; when, in fact, the doctrine of election is the most humiliating that can be imagined, and the denial of it is the fruit of ignorance and presumption — — —

That this is a principal ground of men's enmity against the people of God is asserted by our Lord; and it is confirmed by every part of the Sacred Records. Why did Cain hate Abel, but for the distinguishing favour shewn him by God?

[aa] See 2 Tim. i. 9. Rom. xi. 5.

God[b]? In like manner Esau hated Jacob, not merely for the manner in which he had gained the blessing, but because the birthright was transferred to him. Thus Saul hated David also, because he saw that God was with him: and the Jews sought to destroy our Lord for no other reason than because he had brought to their recollection some instances wherein God had imparted to Gentiles favours which he had withheld from his own peculiar people[c].]

2. Their separation from the world—

[When once a Christian sees the sin and danger of a carnal life, he will of necessity depart from it. He not only desires to obey the command which says, "Come out from among them and be separate," but he perceives, that, with his new views and principles, he can no more maintain communion with the world than light can with darkness, or Christ with Belial[d]. Hence he no longer walks in "the broad road that leadeth to destruction, but in the narrow path that leadeth unto life."

This is another great occasion of offence to the ungodly world: for in departing from the pursuits and vanities of the world, the Christian does, in effect, declare the danger of those who still adhere to them; just as "Noah condemned the world" by building the ark, and Lot condemned Sodom by fleeing from it[e]. "Those who are of the world, the world will approve and love;" because their spirit and conduct have a direct tendency to justify the world in all its proceedings: but "those who, like their Lord, are not of the world," and refuse to be conformed to its maxims and ways, will assuredly become objects of the world's displeasure; for though their testimony be never audibly delivered, it will be seen and felt; and every effort will be made on the part of the world to bring back those who have deserted its standard and enlisted themselves under the banners of the Lord Jesus[f].]

That there is, however, no cause for alarm, will appear, if we consider,

II. What are those considerations which Christ has suggested for their support—

We confine ourselves to those mentioned in the text—

1. Our Lord himself was so treated—

[For the truth of this he appeals to his own Disciples: they had seen how justly he was characterized by the prophet, as

[b] Gen. iv. 4, 5. 1 John iii. 12.
[c] Luke iv. 25—29.
[d] 2 Cor. vi. 14—17.
[e] Prov. xxviii. 4.
[f] Ps. xxxviii. 20. Gal. iv. 29.

as "one whom man despised, and whom the nation abhorred[g]." They had seen how evil he had been treated, notwithstanding his unerring wisdom, his spotless piety, his unbounded benevolence.

Now, if He, *our Head and Chief*, was so hated by an ungodly world, how can *we* hope to escape their enmity? We have in him an indisputable proof, that no wisdom, no prudence, no perfection of character, can enable us to obtain the approbation of worldly men: on the contrary, the more entirely we resemble him, the more shall we be hated by his enemies.

And may we not find in this abundant consolation? If we were not so treated, we should have reason to doubt whether we were "walking as he walked:" but if we are reviled and persecuted as he was, then have we an evidence that we belong to him; and we have reason to "rejoice, inasmuch as we are partakers of his sufferings[h]."]

2. He has forewarned us to expect no other treatment than that which he himself received—

[We might well suppose, that, if HE was so treated, *we* should meet with similar treatment: for reason itself teaches us that the servant ought not to expect a better reception than his lord. But our Saviour himself also has told us this[i], and particularly calls upon us to "remember" his words. Indeed, if we only remembered what he has spoken to us, we should never be surprised at any thing that we meet with; seeing that he has so plainly forewarned us of it. He has even told us, that the persecutions we meet with shall "turn *unto* us for a testimony." Being then fore-warned, we should be fore-armed. This was the consideration with which St. Paul endeavoured to comfort the Thessalonians, when they were startled at the greatness and multitude of his afflictions[k]: and, in truth, if the Scriptures be fulfilled in us, as they were in Christ, we may well be reconciled to whatever an ungodly world may inflict upon us.]

ADDRESS,

1. Those who are afraid of incurring the hatred of the world—

[Doubtless the hatred of the world is not to be desired: we should rather, if it could be, that they should love us: but, if the friendship of the world be incompatible with fidelity to God[l], then may we very cheerfully forego it. If we be apprehensive of consequences, what is there to fear[m]? Man,

[g] Isai. xlix. 7. [h] 1 Pet. iv. 12, 13. [i] Matt. x. 22—26.
[k] 1 Thess. iii. 4. [l] Jam. iv. 4. [m] Isai. li. 12, 13.

Man, at the utmost, can only kill the body; whereas God can kill the soul: and therefore God only and exclusively should be the object of our fear[n].]

2. Those who have braved and borne the enmity of the world—

[Do you repent of what you have done? Has not God made up to you all that you ever suffered for his sake? Do you think that you will ever feel regret, when you come to heaven, that you suffered so much in your way thither? Are you not even ashamed that you ever for a moment accounted the cross of Christ heavy, or that you groaned under its weight? Sure I am, that "you shall receive an hundred-fold even in this life, *with persecutions;*" and that one moment's enjoyment of your Saviour's presence will abundantly repay all that you endured for his sake. Be not careful then what men may do against you: only seek to cut off occasion from those who seek occasion; and determine through grâce, that they "shall find no occasion against you, except concerning the law of your God."]

[n] Luke xii. 4, 5.

DCCCXXX.

OFFICES OF THE HOLY SPIRIT.

John xvi. 8—11. *And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: of sin, because they believe not on me; of righteousness, because I go to the Father, and ye see me no more: of judgment, because the prince of this world is judged.*

IN judging of the dispensations of God's providence or grace, we are extremely apt to err—

Hence we often mourn for things, which, if we knew the end of them, would afford us occasion for joy—

This was the case with the Disciples, who were dejected on account of their Lord's approaching departure from them—

To relieve their minds, our Lord not only promised them another Comforter, but told them for what ends and purposes that Comforter should come—

I. To "convince the world of sin"

This office the Spirit executed among the Jews—

[The

[The sin of rejecting Christ was that which the Spirit was more particularly to reveal to the world—

And he discovered it fully by his *miraculous operations* on the Disciples[a]—and wrought an irresistible conviction of it by his *gracious influences* on the hearts of thousands—]

This office too he yet executes in the Christian Church—

[The external testimony which he gave, remains the same in all ages—

The internal witness is given to those only whom "God has ordained to life"—

To them the Spirit shews the number, the greatness, the malignity of their sins—and particularly, the guilt, and danger of that unbelief, in which they have ignorantly lain—

This is the Spirit's work; nor is it wrought in any, but by his almighty power[b]—]

If he proceeded no farther, he would not be a Comforter; but it is his office also,

II. To convince the world "of righteousness"—

This also was accomplished by him on his first descent from heaven—

[Christ, though professing himself the Saviour of the world, had been crucified as a malefactor—

The Spirit therefore was to evince, both that Christ was a righteous person, and that through his righteousness others also might be saved—

Accordingly, by his descent, the Spirit proved these things beyond a doubt—

He shewed that Christ was accepted of the Father (which he would not have been, if he had been an impostor), and had finished all that was necessary for our salvation; seeing that, if any thing had remained to have been done on earth, he must have returned hither in order to complete it[c]—

He moreover inclined, and enabled multitudes to believe on HIM for righteousness, whom they had just before reprobated as worthy of universal execration—]

And yet daily is he occupied in glorifying Christ among us—

[Whom-

[a] Christ had stated, as it were, the whole credit of his Messiahship on this one point: consequently, the visible descent of the Spirit, accompanied with the miraculous gift of tongues, was such an attestation to Christ, as could not be doubted, and such a reproof to his murderers as could not be withstood.

[b] Zech. iv. 6. 2 Cor. v. 5. 1 Cor. xii. 11.

[c] See the text.

[Whomsoever the Spirit convinces thoroughly of sin, he leads also to discoveries of Christ—

He shews to the soul the suitableness and all-sufficiency of Christ's righteousness to all those who trust in it[d]—

And leads them, with holy glorying, to say, "In the Lord have I righteousness and strength[e]"—]

He has yet further undertaken,

III. To convince the world of judgment—

He shewed to the first Christians that Satan was a vanquished foe—

[By the descent of the Spirit it was manifest, that Christ had triumphed over sin and Satan, death and hell[f]—

By his gracious influences also, he rescued myriads from their power—and inspired them with an holy confidence, that they should finally prevail over all their spiritual enemies[g]—]

Thus at this day does he cause the weakest to exult over their fallen enemy—

[However active and malicious Satan is, his head is bruised[h], his power is limited[i], his doom is fixed[k]—

Of this the Holy Spirit assures the weak and trembling Believer—

And puts into his mouth, even in the midst of all his conflicts, that triumphant song[l]—]

USES,

1. Of conviction—

[All true Christians have received the Spirit for the ends and purposes for which he is here promised—

In vain then will be our orthodoxy in sentiment, if we have not this evidence of our conversion to God[m]—

Let us pray that the Spirit may be poured out upon us—

And let our views of our guilt and weakness lead us to glory in Christ alone—]

2. Of consolation—

[Are we bowed down with a *sense* of sin? we may be sure that Christ has sent his Spirit to work that conviction in us; and that, if we be instant in prayer, he will, by the same Spirit, lead us also to a view of his righteousness—

Are we ready to despond by reason of the *power* of sin? the resistance which the Holy Spirit has enabled us already to make to

[d] ver. 14. [e] Isai. xlv. 24. [f] Eph. iv. 8. Col. ii. 15.
[g] 2 Tim. i. 12. [h] Gen. iii. 15. [i] Rev. ii. 10. 1 Pet. v. 8.
[k] Rom. xvi. 20. [l] Rom. viii. 38, 39. [m] ib. ver. 9.

to its dominion, is a pledge that "we shall be more than conquerors, through Him that loved us[a]."

Let us only seek the Spirit as our Comforter, and we need regret no loss, no pain, no trouble, that may be the means of bringing him into our hearts—]

[a] Rom. viii. 37.

DCCCXXXI.

THE OFFICE OF THE SPIRIT TO GLORIFY CHRIST.

John xvi. 14. *He shall glorify me: for he shall receive of mine, and shall shew it unto you.*

MANY imagine that the doctrine of the Divinity of Christ is founded on some few passages of Holy Writ, on passages too which may possibly be of doubtful interpretation. But the truth is, that that doctrine pervades the whole New Testament; so that scarcely any part of it can be fairly explained except on the hypothesis that Christ is God. Take for instance the passage before us. Our blessed Saviour told his Disciples that he would "*send* to them the Comforter, even the Spirit of Truth, who should guide them into all truth, and shew them things to come[a]." But is he a *man*, or a mere *created being*, that arrogates to himself this power? Of that Spirit he proceeds to say, "He shall glorify *me*." What language is this? Does a *creature* say, he will send the Spirit of the living God to glorify *him*? That *God* should send a *creature* for the advancement of *his own* glory, is intelligible enough: but that a *creature* should send *God* for the advancement of *his* glory, is what no rational being would for a moment admit. But further; our Saviour adds, "He shall receive of *mine*, and shall shew it unto you." What? Has a *creature* any thing that he can call *his own*; and which is of so mysterious a nature, that it cannot be known, except God himself shall make it the subject of a special revelation? And has he such *an exclusive propriety* in that thing, that it must be acknowledged to be *his*, at the very time that God is taking of it in order to shew

[a] ver. 7, 13.

shew it unto men? This was so strong an assertion of his Godhead, that the Disciples themselves appear to have been staggered at it; on which account our Lord proceeded to vindicate and confirm the expression he had used: "All that the Father hath, is *mine*: therefore said I, that he shall take of *mine*, and shall shew it unto you[aa]."

The whole declaration, if viewed in this light only, is of infinite importance: but, without insisting on this doctrine, which only incidentally arises out of the text, we shall turn our attention to the doctrines more directly contained in it; and shall shew you,

I. The office of the Spirit—

The whole of our Saviour's life was a state of humiliation: the establishing of his proper character was committed to the third Person in the ever-blessed Trinity, who was in due time to come down from heaven for the express purpose of glorifying Christ. In what way he was to glorify Christ, is specified in the text; he was to take, as it were, all the excellencies of Christ, and to display them before the eyes of all his people. Among these excellencies we will mention a few, which are deserving of more especial notice:

1. The virtue of his sacrifice—

[Man, as soon as he begins to be truly "convinced of sin," is apt to doubt whether his iniquities be not too great to be forgiven. But the Holy Spirit discovers to him from the word, that the death of Christ was a propitiation, not for the sins of a few only, but for the sins of the whole world; that "his blood has an efficacy to cleanse from all sin;" and that all who believe in him "shall be justified from all things," even from "sins of a scarlet or crimson dye." How glorious does Christ then appear in the sinner's eyes!]

2. The prevalence of his intercession—

[After a person has believed in Christ, he still is renewed only in part; "the flesh still lusteth against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh, so that he cannot do the things that he would." Hence he is sometimes led to fear that God will cast him off, and be no more entreated by him. Then the

[aa] ver. 15.

the Holy Spirit shews him that Christ is "his Advocate with the Father,[b]," and that he "ever liveth in heaven on purpose to make intercession for him." He convinces him that Christ can never intercede in vain, for that "*him* the Father heareth always;" and that consequently the backslider, as well as the newly-awakened sinner, shall be saved to the uttermost, if only he look to Christ as his all-prevailing Advocate and Mediator. Thus the Spirit still further endears the Saviour to the believing soul.]

3. The sufficiency of his grace—

[Conflicts innumerable both with sin and Satan will still remain, even such conflicts as may bring the Believer sometimes to the borders of despair. But then the Spirit again proceeds in his work of glorifying Christ: he shews the soul, that there is, by the Father's own appointment, an inexhaustible fulness of grace treasured up in Christ[c]; out of which his people shall receive all the grace that they shall stand in need of[d]: and that, whatever their conflicts or temptations may be, his grace shall be sufficient for them[e]. How precious does Christ then become, when the Believer, after crying, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me?" is "enabled to add," I thank God, through Jesus Christ our Lord[f]:" "In the Lord have I righteousness and strength[g]!"]

4. The extent of his love—

[Of this no finite being can form any adequate idea; much less can the language of mortality express it. But in some degree it is the privilege of "all saints to have" it "revealed to them by the Spirit." The times and seasons, as well as the manner and degree, of making this revelation to the soul, are altogether ordered by that Spirit "who divideth to every man severally as he will." Generally it is in some season of trial or affliction, and by means either of some remarkable providence, or of the written word, that he thus glorifies Christ: but, oh! when he does take of the love of Christ, and discover unto men "its length and breadth and depth and height[h]," what joy and transport does he impart! truly it is "a joy that is unspeakable and gorified;" a very heaven upon earth. Such manifestations of the Saviour's glory cannot be made to the world, because the world has no dispositions suited to them: but to the Believer they are made; and they produce in him a determination of heart to consecrate himself wholly and for ever to the Lord.]

4. The

[b] 1 John ii. 2. [c] Col. ii. 9. [d] John i. 16.
[e] 2 Cor. xii. 9. [f] Rom. vii. 24, 25. [g] Isai. xlv. 24, 25.
[h] Eph. iii. 17, 18.

5. The greatness of his salvation—

[Salvation, when first embraced, is regarded almost exclusively as a deliverance from everlasting punishment. But when the Spirit of God brings it more fully to our view, how amazing does it appear; and how glorious does that Saviour appear who has obtained it for us! The renovation of the soul after the Divine image, and the investing of it with all the glory and felicity of heaven, a glory inconceivable, a felicity everlasting; truly Salvation, in this view of it, overwhelms the soul with wonder, and prepares it to do and suffer whatever can be done or suffered, for the ultimate enjoyment of it.]

Such being the office of the Spirit, let us consider,

II. Our duty arising from it—

We have an office similar in some respects to that which is sustained by the Spirit himself: we are all in our place and station to glorify Christ, and to take of the things that are his, and shew them unto men. This is our duty,

1. As Ministers—

[Our Lord particularly marks this connexion between the office of the Holy Spirit, and that which his Disciples were to execute in the world[i]. They were sent forth, as all other Ministers are, to testify of Christ, and to exalt him in the eyes of men. At this day, no less than in the Apostolic age, is this the duty of those who are his ambassadors to a guilty world: we are to speak of Christ, to set forth the fulness and excellency of his salvation, and to commend him to the love of all around us. Counting all things but dung for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ ourselves, we should labour day and night to impart it unto others. How earnest the Apostles were in this blessed work, may be seen from their first addresses to the unbelieving Jews[k]: and we in like manner should "contend earnestly for the faith," and "determine to know nothing among our people but Jesus Christ and him crucified." The treasure of divine knowledge is put into us, as earthen vessels, for this purpose; and "God has shined into our hearts for this very end, that we may give unto all around us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ[l]." What a glorious office is this! O that every Minister bore it fully in mind; and that all who profess to execute it, might execute it with their whole hearts, and "with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven."]

2. As

[i] John xv. 26, 27. [k] Acts ii. 32—36, & iv. 10—12.
[l] 2 Cor. iv. 6, 7.

2. As private Christians—

[Our Lord assigns the same office to all his people; "All mine are thine, and thine are mine; and I am glorified in them[m]." All indeed are not called upon to exert themselves as Ministers: but all are to glorify Christ by a holy conversation, and are to take of *his* virtues and *his* graces, and to exhibit them to the world. This is one end of their calling, namely, "to shew forth the *virtues* of him that hath called them out of darkness into his marvellous light[n]." All are to "shine as lights in the world, holding forth the word of life" in their own conduct, so that all may read it, yea, may be compelled to read it, as transcribed in their lives[o]. What an exalted office is this for every private Christian! O that all might be ambitious to execute it aright! for Christ himself has said, "Herein is my Father glorified, that ye may bring forth much fruit; so shall ye be my Disciples[p]."]

[m] John xvii. 10. [n] 1 Pet. ii. 9. The marginal reading.
[o] Phil. ii. 15, 16. [p] John xv. 8.

DCCCXXXII.

THE BENEFIT OF PRAYER.

John xvi. 24. *Ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full.*

THIS world is justly characterized as a vale of tears. Even they who experience the most happiness, find many interruptions of it: nor is there any way of securing permanent tranquillity, but by waiting upon God in prayer.

The Disciples were sorrowful on account of the approaching departure of their Lord, with whom they had hitherto enjoyed the most familiar fellowship. Our Lord tells them, that though they would no longer be able to *inquire*[a] of him, yet, if they would *ask*[b] of the Father in his name, he would grant them whatsoever they should need; and that the answers which they should receive to their prayers would abundantly overbalance the loss of their present privileges, and fill them with unutterable joy.

In the direction given them, we may notice,

I. Our

[a] ver. 23. ἐρωτήσετε. [b] ib. αἰτήσητε.

I. Our duty—

It is comprised in one word, "Ask." Now this is,

1. An easy duty—

[We do not mean that it is always easy to pray, (for there is nothing more difficult when the heart is indisposed for that exercise;) but that is the easiest condition that could possibly be imposed———and that, when the heart is in a proper frame, prayer is as easy to the soul, as breathing is to the body: it is the first, and most natural, effort of a living soul: "Behold, he prayeth[c]!"]

2. A reasonable duty—

[Man is a dependent creature; and it is but reasonable that he should acknowledge that dependence at a throne of grace, and ask for those mercies which he stands in need of. The very Heathens have felt the propriety of supplicating their deities, and have established ordinances whereby they might conciliate the favour of their gods. It is true, that God knows our necessities before we ask: yet is it highly proper that we should spread them before him, in order that we ourselves may be humbled under a sense of them, and that God's mercy in relieving them may be more clearly seen.]

3. A necessary duty—

[Though God cannot be prevailed upon by dint of importunity[d], yet he has appointed prayer as the means of obtaining his blessings. He has said, "I will be inquired of to do it for them[e]." There is no room therefore left for us to speculate upon the use of prayer: it is quite sufficient that God has required it as means to an end: and if we will not comply with his injunctions respecting it, it is utterly in vain for us to expect his blessings.]

4. An acceptable duty—

[Prayer offered to the Deity without any respect to the mediation of Christ, is not acceptable: but when presented in a humble dependence on his atonement, and intercession, it comes up before God as incense, and prevails beyond the utmost extent of our conceptions. It is to prayer *offered in this manner*, that the promise in the text is given[f]. And this has been the qualification of all acceptable prayer from the beginning. Abel was heard on account of his sacrifice[g]. The penitents under the law obtained mercy in no other way[h]. The

[c] Acts ix. 11.

[d] The expressions, Luke xviii. 7, 8. must not lead us to think of God as though he were wrought upon as we are.

[e] Ezek. xxxvi. 37. [f] ver. 23, 24. [g] Heb. xi. 4.

[h] Heb. ix. 22.

The Jews, when unable, by reason of their captivity, to offer their accustomed sacrifices, were to look towards the Temple, which was a type of our incarnate God[i]. And to that same Jesus must we look, trusting in him as "our Advocate with the Father, and as the propitiation for our sins[k]." Nor did any one ever ask *in this manner* without obtaining a supply of all his wants.]

To counteract the backwardness of our hearts to this duty, let us consider,

II. Our encouragement to perform it—

The promise of acceptance is without any limit or exception—

[There is no exception with respect to the persons who may apply to God. The vilest person in the universe, provided he ask *in the manner prescribed in the text*, shall be heard as readily as the very chief of the Apostles. His past iniquities, of whatever kind they have been, shall not operate as any bar to his acceptance with God———

Nor is there any limit respecting the blessings we implore: provided they will really conduce to our good, and to God's glory, they shall be given. However "wide we open our mouths, God will fill them[l]"———The frequent and solemn repetition of this truth by our Lord himself, must of necessity remove all doubt upon the subject[m].]

And instances of its accomplishment occur in almost every page of the Sacred Writings—

[Whether Abel's prayer was answered by fire from heaven which consumed his sacrifice, or by some other token of the Divine favour, the acceptance of it was equally manifest, and the fact is equally encouraging to us. To recount the various instances that occurred from that period to the times of Christ and his Apostles, would be a pleasing task, but would occupy many hours. Suffice it to say, that whether men's prayer has been offered for themselves[n] or for others[o], and whether it has been of a more stated and solemn kind[p], or only in a sudden ejaculation[q], it has equally prevailed; it has prevailed speedily[r], and to a most incredible extent[s]; and shall yet prevail, by whomsoever it may be offered[t].]

This encouragement to prayer is greatly heightened by what is added respecting,

III The

[i] 1 Kin. viii. 47, 48. Dan. vi. 10.
[k] 1 John ii. 1, 2.
[l] Ps. lxxxi. 10. John xiv. 13, 14.
[m] Matt. vii. 7, 8.
[n] Jonah ii. 1, 7.
[o] Exod. xxxii. 11—14. Acts xii. 5—9.
[p] Ps. xviii. 6.
[q] Neh. ii. 4—6.
[r] 2 Kin. xx. 2, 4, 5. Dan. ix. 20, 21, 23.
[s] Jam. v. 17, 18.
[t] ib. ver. 16.

III. The consequence of a due and acceptable performance of it—

God delights in the prosperity of his people; and desires that they should be happy here, as well as in the world to come. It is with this view that he has enjoined prayer as a duty; because, when performed aright, it is the means of filling the soul with the sublimest joy.

1. It tranquillizes the most perturbed mind—

[Let a person under any sudden irritation or calamity betake himself to prayer, and he will speedily find the tempest calmed, and his agitations quieted. No other thing will operate like this. It will enable him to educe good out of every evil: it will not only blunt the edge of all his trials, but will turn his sorrows into joy[u].]

2. It brings God nigh unto the soul—

[God in answer to prayer will take away the veil which intercepts our views of him, and "manifest himself to us, as he does not unto the world." What an exhibition of his glory was that which he vouchsafed to Moses! What a bright display of Christ's excellency was that which the three favoured Disciples were admitted to behold on Mount Tabor! We say not indeed that any similar vision of the Father or the Son shall ever be presented to our bodily eyes: but God will certainly "shine into the hearts of those who call upon him, to give them the light of the knowledge of his glory in the face of Jesus Christ[x];" and will enable them to say, "Truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ[y]." What ineffable delight must such manifestations bring with them!———]

3. It gives us an earnest and foretaste of heaven itself—

[The happiness of heaven consists in the vision and fruition of God: and this, as far as it can be enjoyed by faith, is enjoyed in prayer. There is not any one who has abounded in the performance of this duty, but has had frequent occasion, when in his closet, to exclaim with Jacob, "This is none other but the house of God, this is the gate of heaven[z]!" In such seasons as these a man has no occasion to search out evidences of his acceptance with God, or of his title to heaven; for the very intercourse which he has with the Deity is, if we may so speak, heaven brought down to earth; it is an actual anticipation

[u] Ps. xxx. 8—11. & xl. 1—3.
[x] 2 Cor. iv. 6.
[y] 1 John i. 3.
[z] Gen. xxviii. 17.

anticipation of heaven, and a pledge of his complete possession of it in due season.]

ADDRESS,

1. To those who ask without receiving—

[Think not that God has violated his promise. The reason of your not receiving is, that "you ask amiss[a]." Your petitions are cold, formal, hypocritical; and you have not a due respect to the name of Jesus in presenting them to God. Perform your duty as you ought, and you shall never complain of a want of acceptance in it.]

2. To those who have received answers to prayer—

[Let not your communion with God puff you up with pride, but rather abase you in the dust. If once you grow vain and secure, you will provoke God to hide his face from you, and to withhold the communications of his grace. Rejoice in the glorious privileges you possess; but "rejoice with trembling."]

[a] Jam. iv. 3.

DCCCXXXIII.

THE OBJECTS OF THE FATHER'S LOVE.

John xvi. 27. *The Father himself loveth you, because ye have loved me, and have believed that I came out from God.*

THE atonement and intercession of Christ are doubtless the grounds of a Christian's hope, and the richest source of his comforts: but much consolation also may be derived from the consideration of the Father's love; nor do we understand the Gospel aright, till we see that Christ himself was the gift of the Father's love, and that every blessing which we receive through Christ was prepared for us in the eternal counsels of the Father. Our Lord, solicitous to comfort his Disciples previous to his departure from them, directed their views unto the Father, assuring them, that, while they prayed to the Father in his name, they should find acceptance and support; and this too, not *merely* in consequence of his intercession, but also in consequence of the love which the Father himself bore towards them. In discoursing upon his words, we shall speak of,

I. The

I. The objects of the Father's love—

The description which our Lord gives of his own Disciples will characterize all his faithful followers to the end of time—

They love the Lord Jesus Christ—

[There is not a real Christian in the universe who does not *esteem* the Lord Jesus above every other Being, *desire* him more than thousands of silver and gold, and *delight in* him as the only source of true happiness. To love him more, and to serve him better, is the daily labour of his soul, and the very summit of his ambition.]

They believe in him—

[True Christians do not merely assent to this proposition, That Jesus is the Messiah; but they most cordially acquiesce in his appointment to that office; they trust altogether in his Mediatorial work; and they seek to receive out of his fulness the blessings which he was sent to communicate.]

All who are of this description are, *for that very reason*, objects of the Father's love—

[By the exercise of faith and love, they honour the Lord Jesus Christ in the world; and in so doing they honour the Father also[a]:—*on this account* the Father loves and honours them. We do not mean to intimate, that their graces *merit* the Divine favour, (for "their best righteousnesses are as filthy rags[b];") or that their graces are the *spring and source* of the Father's love, (for God's love was from everlasting[c], and was exercised by him in a perfectly free and sovereign manner:) but we say, that their exercise of faith and love is *the occasion* of God's *manifesting* his love to them. Abel's offering of a lamb, in token of his dependence on that Lamb of God which was to be slain in due time, was *the occasion* of God's testifying his acceptance in a visible manner; and God justified his apparent partiality, by declaring this act to have been *the ground* of the preference he had shewn to Abel[d]. When Abraham also had offered up his son, God made his faith and obedience *the occasion* and *the ground* of manifesting his love to Abraham[e]. The Scriptures uniformly speak the same language[f]; nor are we in danger of erring, provided we discriminate between the *meritorious ground* on which God's favours are secured, and the *particular occasion* on which his love may be *manifested*.]

If

[a] John v. 23. [b] Isai. lxiv. 6. [c] Jer. xxxi. 3.
[d] Gen. iv. 4—7. Heb. xi. 4. [e] Gen. xxii. 16, 17.
[f] Ps. xci. 14—16.

If we believe that any are so distinguished by the Father, we cannot but wish to know,

II. The manner in which he displays his love towards them—

We might easily trace this part of our subject in the experience of those to whom the words of the text were immediately addressed; but, as it is of general importance, we shall rather treat it in a way that is alike applicable to all:

1. He watches over them by his providence—

[The dearest of God's Children may appear to others, perhaps also to themselves, to be forsaken of God. But the Father's eye is ever upon them for good, and "runneth to and fro throughout the whole earth, to interpose effectually in their behalf[g]." They may be suffered to want for a season, in order that they may be stirred up to seek relief from him: but they shall assuredly be supplied with every thing that is needful for them[h]. They may experience many deep and heavy afflictions, but not one which shall not ultimately "work for their good[i]."]

2. He keeps them by his grace—

[God is not an unconcerned spectator of his people's conflicts. He shields their heads in the day of battle. If they fall, he raises them up; if they be wounded, he heals them; if they faint, he renews their strength[k]. He will not endue them with such a degree of grace as shall supersede the need of vigilance and exertion; nor will he commit to them a stock that shall suffice for months or days: but he will give them "grace to help *in the time of need*[l];" and that "grace shall be sufficient for them." Thus will he secure them from the destruction which they fear, and make them "more than conquerors, through Him that loved them[m]."]

3. He comforts them by his presence—

[Who can express the consolations which God sometimes pours into the souls of those who wait upon him? They have been weeping perhaps under a sense of sin, or lamenting a state of spiritual darkness; and behold, God reveals himself unto them; their "light rises in obscurity, and their darkness becomes as the noon-day." Often will God "manifest himself to them as he does not unto the world;" he will give them "a spirit of adoption, whereby they shall cry with confidence,

[g] 2 Chron. xvi. 9. [h] Ps. xxxiv. 10. [i] Rom. viii. 28.
[k] Ps. cxlvi. 7, 8. [l] Heb. iv. 16. [m] Rom. viii. 37.

confidence, Abba, Father;" and will so "shed abroad his love in their hearts," that they shall have "an earnest of their inheritance," and a foretaste of the heavenly glory. This is promised by God himself to all who love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity, and is actually experienced by many who can attest his fidelity[n].]

ADDRESS,

1. Those who are destitute of love to Christ, and of faith in him—

[If a mere profession of Christianity be a sufficient proof of our faith and love, we may spare ourselves the trouble of addressing any as though they were destitute of those graces. But if none truly love Christ or believe in him, except they who are altogether devoted to him in heart and life, then the persons we are addressing will be found to constitute the greater part, we fear, of almost every congregation. And what shall we say to such persons? Shall we address them in the words of our text, "The Father himself loveth you?" Would to God we could! But there is not one amongst you so ignorant, as not to know, that such an assertion would be false. Let your own consciences judge: Can God love those who neglect and despise his dear Son? Let the Scriptures determine. Does not St. Paul say, "If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema, Maran-atha[o]?" Be assured that God cannot be your Father: for our Lord says expressly, "If God were your Father, ye would *love* me[p]." Be assured too, that if you die as you are, you must perish for ever; for Christ says again, "If ye *believe* not that I am He, ye shall die in your sins[q]." Repent ye then of all your ingratitude and unbelief, and "turn to your strong-hold, as prisoners of hope:" begin to "live by faith in the Son of God;" and "delight yourselves in him" now, that ye may be meet to enjoy him in a better world.]

2. Those to whom Christ is precious—

[Thanks be to God! there is a little flock that hear the voice of the good Shepherd, and that follow his steps. Think then, ye who love the Lord, how greatly ye are honoured, how highly ye are privileged; The Father himself loveth you! To say that all good and holy men loved you, or that all the angels in heaven loved you, would be a rich blessing: but to be loved by the Creator of men and angels, to be loved by the Father himself, O! who can estimate this blessing? It is true, that the very thing which causes God to love

[n] John xiv. 21, 23.
[o] 1 Cor. xvi. 22.
[p] John viii. 42.
[q] John viii. 24.

love you, will cause the blind and the wicked world to hate you[r]: but why should you regard the hatred and contempt of men, if you are owned and approved of your God? "Let them curse, provided your God condescend to bless." And if your "love at any time be ready to wax cold through the abounding of iniquity" around you, remember that *the very thing which heightens man's resentment, will call forth the manifestations of God's favour;* and that when your enemies shall "want a drop of water to cool their tongue," you shall "be drinking of those rivers of pleasure which are at God's right hand for evermore."]

[r] John xv. 19.

DCCCXXXIV.

OUR LORD'S PRAYER TO BE GLORIFIED ON EARTH.

John xvii. 1. *These words spake Jesus, and lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, Father, the hour is come; glorify thy Son, that thy Son also may glorify thee.*

THE work of intercession belongs to Christ, as the High-Priest of his Church—

We know not the precise manner in which He carries it on within the veil—

But we may form some idea of it from the specimen recorded in this chapter—

He had given all the instructions necessary for the support and comfort of his Disciples—

And now, in their hearing, concluded with this sublime and pathetic prayer—

But before he interceded for them, he offered one petition for himself—

In explaining the words before us, we shall consider,

I. Our Lord's request—

His outward gesture corresponded with the feelings of his heart—

Deeply affected with his own condition, he presented a request well suited to his circumstances—

It imported,

1. That his Father should bear testimony to him in his trouble—

[Jesus was now to endure all possible indignities, as an impostor—

On-

On this account he more than ever needed a testimony on his behalf—

And God, in answer to this request, gave ample testimony to his Messiahship [a]—]

2. That he should support him under it—

[As man, our Lord needed the supports of Divine grace—

And these he was to obtain, like ourselves, by fervent prayer—

Nor was his application for them made to his Father in vain—

Under his most accumulated distresses, both of body and soul, he was kept unspotted with the slightest stain of sin or error [b]—]

3. That he should bring him out of it—

[Had there been no interposition of the Deity to rescue him from his disgrace, his enemies would have had reason to triumph—

But God delivered him from the grave, and exalted him to glory—

And made those very precautions, that were used to ascertain and expose his imposture, the means of establishing the truth which they were intended to subvert—]

4. That he should render it effectual to the salvation of men—

[Without this, all our Lord's sufferings would have been in vain—

But while he yet hanged on the cross, the saving efficacy of his death was shewn—

And speedily after his ascension, multitudes flocked to him, as doves to their windows—]

These things being necessary to the glorifying of himself, Jesus taught them with becoming earnestness—

II. The pleas with which he enforced it—

Our own necessity and God's glory are among the most powerful pleas which can be urged—

Such were those with which our Lord enforced his petition;

1. His own necessity, "The hour is come"—

[The

[a] He caused both him that betrayed, and him that condemned, our Lord, to attest his innocence; and made even the inanimate creation to bear witness to him.

[b] John xiii. 31.

[The hour alluded to was the season of his sufferings and death—

This had been fixed from eternity in the Divine counsels—

And had been foretold and typified from the beginning of the world—

Till its arrival, none of his enemies could lay hands on him—

But now men and devils, yea, and God himself, were to concur in afflicting him—

What a weighty reason was this for his petition!

He had been ordained by the Father himself to those sufferings—

The weight which he was to sustain was inconceivably great—

The smallest failure on his part would defeat the end of his mission—

Nor could any thing less than the most miraculous testimonies counterbalance the offence of the cross—

Under such circumstances, the Father could not but answer this seasonable request—]

2. His Father's glory—

The Father's glory was deeply interested in the event of that hour—

His justice was to be honoured, and a way was to be opened for the free exercise of his mercy—

To effect this, was the great object of our Lord's desire, both in life and in death—

And it was *this*, which, above all, stimulated him to present the petition before us [c]—

And could there possibly be a more weighty and prevailing argument?—

The Father could not but desire the advancement of his own glory—

He could not but wish his own eternal counsels fulfilled—

He could not but approve the means which he himself had appointed to that end—

He could not but delight to glorify his Son, who was, in such an humiliating way, endeavouring to glorify him—]

Let this subject lead us to view Jesus,

1. As our Saviour—

[For *us* did he agree that that dreadful hour should come—

And to us he looks, that we may join with the Father in glorifying him—

And

[c] As Elijah, at the hour of Evening Sacrifice, felt jealous for God's honour (1 Kin. xviii. 36, 37), so did our Lord at this time.

And shall we not glorify him, by trusting in his blood and righteousness?—

Shall we not proclaim to the whole world, that he is our only hope and refuge?—

O let him see of the travail of his soul! let him save us from the wrath to come!]

2. As our example—

[He knew, and could fully estimate the weight of, his impending sufferings—

Nor could it fail but that his human nature should shrink back from them—

Yet he submitted to them, that his Father might be glorified[d]—]

Let us in like manner be resigned to the trials that are allotted us—

[When our hour shall come, let us look to Him as our example—

Let us consider *Him*, lest we be weary and faint in our minds—

Let us welcome whatever comes to us by the Divine appointment—

Let us desire that God may be glorified in us, whether by life or death—

Thus shall we be honoured and comforted in the midst of our sufferings—

And after them be rewarded with a proportionable weight of glory—]

[d] John xii. 27, 28.

DCCCXXXV.

CHRIST'S POWER TO GIVE ETERNAL LIFE.

John xvii. 2. *Thou hast given him power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him.*

WE have in these words an unbounded prospect from eternity to eternity: they present to our view the commission first given by the Father to the Son; they exhibit the Son in due season pleading that commission, and finally executing it when the world shall be no more: they lead us to contemplate,

I. The power given to Christ—

As God, he possessed all power equally with the Father;

Father; but, as Mediator, he received his power from the Father. This power was,

1. Universal in its extent—

[Not only was the material world, with all the brute creation, subject to his will, but man; "power was given him over *all flesh*." His *enemies* are entirely under his control: he restrains their violence[a], defeats their plots[b], and overrules their efforts for the accomplishment of his own eternal counsels[c]———His *friends* and people are his more especial care: he watches over them for good continually[d], succours them when tempted[e], strengthens them when weak[f], and accomplishes in them all the good pleasure of his goodness[g]."———]

2. Infinite in its degree—

[There is nothing beyond the reach of his power. If he chose to annihilate the whole human race, he could effect it in a moment, by a simple act of volition. If, on the contrary, he would change them all into his own Divine image, he could as easily create them all anew, as he at first produced them out of nothing. By making use of second causes indeed, he conceals his own agency: but there is nothing done in the whole creation, which does not originate in him, as the only source of wisdom, and of strength.]

But we are yet more particularly interested in considering,

II. The end for which he was invested with it—

The Father gave to Christ an elect people—

[It is worthy of notice, that Christ, in this his intercessory prayer, speaks again and again of those who were "*given* him" by the Father. And, in truth, if the Father had not given to him a peculiar people, we have no reason to think that any would ever have given themselves to him, since there is not in fallen man either the inclination or the ability to do so[h]. They who do yield themselves up to him are "made willing in the day of God's power[i]," and in consequence of their having been "predestinated unto the adoption of children from before the foundation of the world[k]."]

To these "Christ gives eternal life"—

[The life of grace which is begun in their souls, is the gift of Christ[l]. The continuance of it is the effect of his

continued

[a] Ps. lxxvi. 10. [b] Job v. 12. [c] Ps. ii. 4.
[d] Ps. xxxiv. 15. [e] Heb. ii. 18. [f] 2 Cor. xii. 9.
[g] 2 Thes. i. 11. [h] Phil. ii. 13. [i] Ps. cx. 3.
[k] Eph. i. 4, 5. [l] John iv. 14. & vi. 51.

continued communications[m]. Its consummation also is bestowed by him[n] without any merit in us, or any motive in himself, but a concern for his own, and his Father's glory[o]. Life, in every stage of it, both in this world and the next, is entirely his free gift. One is as much indebted to him for it as another: there will not be one in heaven that will not owe his salvation altogether to the merit of his blood, and to the efficacy of his grace.]

And for the accomplishment of this end he both received and exerts his power—

[It would have been to little purpose to have received from the Father an elect people, if he had not been invested also with power to secure them to himself. The Father well knew how many obstacles there would be to their salvation; and therefore he committed all power to his Son, that nothing might resist his will, or prevent the accomplishment of his eternal counsels. Jesus, thus qualified, orders every thing, both in heaven and earth, with an immediate reference to this great design. Events may sometimes appear to oppose his gracious intentions: but, as in a well-constructed watch the seemingly contrary movements all conduce to one end, so every dispensation, whether of providence or of grace, ultimately tends to his glory in our salvation[p].]

INFER,

1. What madness is it to neglect the Lord Jesus Christ!

[If any man have great preferments in his gift, he is sure to have many courting an interest in his favour. But the Lord Jesus Christ has eternal life to bestow upon us, and yet we can scarcely be induced to ask it at his hands. What strange infatuation! O let us awake from our slumbers, and implore of him the benefits he is so willing to confer.]

2. How great is the security which the Lord's people enjoy!

[Jesus both possesses and exerts omnipotence in their behalf. What then have they to fear? Let them only secure his aid, and they defy both men and devils. "If he be for them, none can effectually be against them."]

3. What obligations do we lie under to love and serve the Lord!

[Is Jesus incessantly exerting his almighty power for us, and should not we employ our talents for him? Oh for a heart duly sensible of his love, and altogether devoted to his service!]

[m] Col. iii. 3, 4.
[n] John xii. 32. & xiv. 19.
[o] John xiv. 13.
[p] Rom. viii. 28.

DCCCXXXVI.

THE IMPORTANCE OF UNION AMONG CHRISTIANS.

John xvii. 20, 21. *Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; that they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me.*

IN the former part of this chapter our Lord has been interceding principally for his own immediate Disciples: but here he intercedes for all his people to the end of time. Who the particular persons were, is known only when the word of God reaches their hearts, and they are made obedient to the faith of Christ. But the substance of the petition is evidently most important; because our Lord had before made the same request in behalf of his own Disciples; and because he repeats it again more strongly in the two verses following our text.

We will endeavour to shew,

I. What is that union which Christ prayed for in our behalf—

If we should interpret the union spoken of in ver. 11. as relating only to the testimony which the Apostles were to bear concerning Christ, still we cannot possibly limit the import of the text to that sense: the terms are too varied and too strong to admit of such a limitation. The comparison instituted between Christ's union with the Father, and ours with each other in him, leads our thoughts into a far different channel; a channel mysterious indeed, but deeply fraught with the richest instruction. Christ is one with the Father, *in essence*, and *in operation*; being "the brightness of his Father's glory and the express image of his person," and at the same time acting in every thing in perfect concert with the Father, having no will but *his*, speaking nothing but according to *his* commands, doing nothing but by *his* direction, and seeking only the glory of *his* name.

This

This fitly illustrates the union which his people have with each other in and through him:

1. They are formed into one body—

[Sometimes they are represented as a Temple, composed of living stones, and having a living stone for its foundation, even Jesus Christ himself; and built up as an habitation for God himself[a]. At other times they are spoken of as a body, of which Christ is the Head, and all the different individuals are members[b]. Thus whilst they are united with each other, they united also with the Father and the Son: "the Father is in Christ, and Christ is in them; and thus they are made perfect in one," ever "growing into Christ as their Head," and contributing to each other's perfection, till they arrive at "the full measure of the stature of Christ[c]."

How earnestly the Lord Jesus Christ desired this, may be gathered from the frequent repetition of it before noticed: and well he might plead for it in this manner, since the accomplishment of it was the principal design of his death[d], and the great end of God the Father in the whole economy of redemption[e].]

2. They are all animated by one Spirit—

["He that is joined to the Lord," says the Apostle, "is one Spirit[f]." This is true of every individual, and of the whole collective body of Believers. "Christ dwells in all of them;" and "as Christ himself lived by the Father, so do they live by him[g]." Hence, as there is no distraction in the body, but, in consequence of its being under the controul of one living and governing principle, its powers are all harmoniously exerted for the attainment of the same object, so the members of Christ's mystical body are one in *sentiment*, in *affection*, and in *the scope and tenor of their lives*.

In *sentiment* they are one: for though, in matters of inferior moment, there may be a wide difference between them, yet in the fundamental points, such as our fall in Adam, our recovery by Christ, our renovation by the Spirit, the evil of sin, the beauty of holiness, the security of Believers, and many other points connected with the spiritual life, there is no difference: all that are taught of God agree in these things; or, if they differ a little in modes of expression, when disputing for opinions, they agree perfectly when they come upon their knees before God; which shews that their differences are rather imaginary than real. There is "an unity of faith" to which they

[a] 1 Pet. ii. 4, 5. Eph. ii. 20—22.
[b] 1 Cor. xii. 12. 13, 27.
[c] Eph. iv. 13, 15, 16.
[d] John xi. 51, 52.
[e] Eph. i. 9, 10.
[f] 1 Cor. vi. 17.
[g] Eph. iii. 17. Col. iii. 4. John vi. 56, 57.

they all come[h]; and which the untutored Indian attains as easily as the most learned philosopher: for it is learned by the *heart* rather than the *head*; and it is God alone that can guide us to the knowledge of it[i].

In *affection* also they are one, being "kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love," and "loving one another with a pure heart fervently." They are all "taught of God to do so[k]." What the real tendency of Christianity is may be seen in the effects produced on the first Christians[l]; and if there is not the same measure of love among Christians of the present day, it is not owing to any want of efficacy in the grace of God, but to the slender measure in which it is possessed: for, in proportion as the grace of Christ abounds in the soul, will ever be the measure of our faith and love[m].

Moreover, in *the scope and tenor of their lives* also they are one. They all acknowledge the Scriptures as the one directory which they are to follow; and, according to their several attainments, "they walk by the same rule[n]" ——Without this, all other "unity," whether "in the faith," or "in the Spirit," is of no avail.

This "holding of the Head" by faith, this ministering to each other by love, and this progressive increase of the whole body in the ways of holiness, constitutes that true union which the Gospel produces, and which our Lord so earnestly desired in our behalf[o].]

Let us now consider,

II. The unspeakable importance of it—

Truly it is of the utmost importance: for on it depends,

1. The honour of Christ—

[In the days of the Apostles, the Messiahship of Christ was abundantly proved by the most stupendous miracles wrought in confirmation of it. But it was the design of God, that, when Christianity was once established, it should carry its own evidence along with it, and convince men by producing such effects in the world as would demonstrate to all its Divine origin. The perfect consistency which there was in the testimony of all the Apostles and of the first teachers of Christianity shewed, that they must have been inspired by the same Spirit; who kept them all from error, and guided them into all truth. In the whole Apostolic age we read of but one point of difference that arose, namely, Whether the believing Gentiles should submit to circumcision or not; and even

[h] Eph. iv. 13. [i] 1 Cor. ii. 14. [k] 1 Thess. iv. 9.
[l] Acts ii. 44, 45 & iv. 32. [m] 1 Tim. i. 14. Eph. iv. 3, 4, 7.
[n] Phil. iii. 16. Gal. vi. 16. [o] Col. ii. 19.

even that was discussed, not for the satisfaction of any of the Apostles, but only of some of the less-enlightened Converts. And the agreement which there was in doctrine, was rendered still more manifest by the wonderful unity which was displayed in the life and conversation of the whole Church. There were indeed spots and blemishes in many; but these were reproved by the authorised teachers of religion, and served to illustrate more clearly the proper efficacy of the Gospel[p]. Twice does our Lord suggest, that this union of his people would confirm the truth of his mission[q]. And certain it is that the same effects are produced by it at this time. Where shall we look for such an union of sentiment, of affection, and of conduct, as is to be found in the Church of Christ? Hence Believers are marked as a peculiar people; and the very peculiarity which pervades the Church of God, makes an impression on the hearts of thousands, who, if they could in an instant attain to the measure of peace and holiness which they see in the true Believer, would willingly sacrifice all that they have in the world for it: and though, from the inveteracy of their corruptions, they are determined to go on in sin, they are constrained to acknowledge, that the Gospel of Christ is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation.]

2. The credit of the Church—

[God the Father "loveth his people, even as he loveth his only dear Son[r]." But how is it to be known that he loves them? Who can look into their hearts, and see those manifestations which he makes of himself there, as he does not unto the world? When "he sheddeth abroad his love there," who can discern it but the persons themselves? or, as Solomon expresses it, Who can "intermeddle with their joy?" But it is to be discerned by the effects it produces on their life, just as the irradiated countenance of Moses attested the intercourse he had held with God. Accordingly, where the piety of any person is of an exalted kind, it carries with it a conviction to the minds of others; it makes religion itself appear honourable, and induces many to say, "We will go with you; for we perceive that God is with you of a truth."]

3. The welfare of the world at large—

[The world in general "hate the light, and will not come to it, lest their deeds should be reproved." But Christians, when truly exemplary, are living witnesses for God: they are epistles of Christ, known and read of all men; and their whole spirit and conduct is a sermon to all around them. St. Peter tells us, that many unbelieving people, who utterly despise

[p] 1 Cor. xi. 19.
[q] Compare v. 23. with the text.
[r] See ver. 23.

despise the word of God, are "won by the good conversation" and conduct of their pious friends. On the other hand, we know that divisions or scandals in the Church are the means of casting before many a stumbling-block, over which they fall, to their eternal ruin. What can more strongly manifest the importance of union in the Church, than such considerations as these? Surely, if the welfare of *the world* so much depends upon it, we cannot wonder that our Lord offered such repeated supplications for it in our behalf; nor should there be any intermission to our exertions for the advancement of it in the Church of God.]

From this subject we may SEE,

1. The duty of the world to unite themselves to the Church—

[The Church is represented as "one fold under one Shepherd." To that fold we must be gathered: nor must we decline that open profession that shall distinguish us for his sheep. If we are ashamed of Christ and his people, Christ will be ashamed of us. We must not only "believe with our hearts unto righteousness, but make confession with our mouths unto salvation." As Judah and Israel are to become one at the latter day, like the two sticks in the prophet's hand[s], so are Jews and Gentiles, rich and poor, to be all one in Christ Jesus[t].]

2. The duty of the Church to be united among themselves—

[Who that hears our blessed Lord pleading so earnestly for this object, can doubt what his duty is in relation to it? If a doubt remain, let the apostle Paul determine it: so desirable was this object in his eyes, that he seemed as if he could never be sufficiently urgent with his converts to cultivate it with all their hearts[u]. Let us then beg of God to "give us one heart and one way;" thus shall the sweetest fellowship be produced, not only with each other, but with the Father and with Christ; and "the blood of Jesus Christ his Son shall cleanse us from all sin[x]."]

[s] Ezek. xxxvii. 16—22. [t] Gal. iii. 28.
[u] 1 Cor. i. 10. Phil. ii. 1—4. [x] 1 John i. 3, 7.

DCCCXXXVII.

JESUS SMITTEN IN THE HIGH PRIEST'S PALACE.

John xviii. 19—23. *The high priest then asked Jesus of his disciples, and of his doctrine. Jesus answered him, I spake openly*

openly to the world: I ever taught in the synagogue, and in the Temple, whither the Jews always resort; and in secret have I said nothing. Why askest thou me? Ask them which heard me, what I have said unto them: behold, they know what I said. And when he had thus spoken, one of the officers which stood by struck Jesus with the palm of his hand, saying, Answerest thou the high priest so? Jesus answered him, If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil: but, if well, why smitest thou me?

THE holy Scriptures are generally considered as containing only matter of historic record; whereas in reality, with the difference only of some outward circumstances, they exhibit a faithful picture of all that is passing at this present day, in ourselves, and in the world around us. Religion is the same now as it always was; and human nature is still the same; and consequently the operations of religion also are the same, whether in those who hate, or those who embrace it. In the history before us, we must, doubtless, primarily regard our blessed Lord as suffering what God in his determinate counsels had ordained him to suffer for the sins of men: but, if we would reap the full benefit from these occurrences, we must view them in their general aspect, as shewing us,

I. How religion is opposed—

Few will admit at all that religion is opposed in the present day: but daily experience proves that it is still, precisely as in former ages, opposed,

1. With inveterate prejudice—

[The interrogations put to Jesus by the high priest had the appearance of candour; (for the bitterest enemies of Christianity wish to maintain somewhat of the semblance of justice:) but they proceeded from nothing but a desire to elicit something from Jesus which should serve as a ground of accusation against him. This was clearly perceived by our blessed Lord; and therefore, instead of suffering himself to be thus ensnared by his blood-thirsty persecutor, he referred him to the very people who were seeking his destruction, that he might learn from them the crimes which they had to lay to his charge. Had the high priest been sincerely desirous of knowing, from Jesus himself, what his doctrines were, and what he expected of his disciples, that he might guard the more effectually against any misrepresentations or mistakes,

takes, and administer justice with impartiality, our Lord would not have withheld from him the necessary information. But the high priest had no such objects in view: his design was only to find an occasion against Jesus, either on account of something which should proceed out of his mouth, or as concealing truths which he dared not to avow.

And do we not here see the spirit in which inquiries are still made at this very hour, in relation both to the doctrines of the Gospel, and to the people who profess it? In what a captious way are questions continually put to religious characters, by those who hate the doctrines of the Gospel! The object of the inquirers is, not to gain such a knowledge as shall convince and satisfy their minds, but to draw forth some answer, which shall either really, or in appearance at least, justify their rejection of all true religion. So also in relation to the followers of Christ; their enemies have no wish to hear any thing in their favour: all that they want, is, to collect anecdotes to the disadvantage of those who profess godliness, and to find reasons for holding them up to derision and reproach. The very same spirit which urged on the enemies of Daniel[a], wrought also in the enemies of Jesus[b], and still reigns, though often cloked under the most specious garb, in all who embrace not the Gospel of Christ[c].]

2. With licentious violence—

[Nothing could be more honourable than our Lord's appeal to those who surrounded him; since they had all heard his discourses continually in the Temple, and were thoroughly disposed to bring their accusations against him, if they were able to lay any thing to his charge. Yet behold, this appeal, instead of being received as a declaration of his innocence, was resented as an indignity offered to the high priest; and *that* too in a way which was contrary to all law, or equity, or common humanity: in a court of justice itself, an officer of that court, in the very presence of the judge, struck the prisoner, not only uncondemned, but unheard, yea, and before even an accusation had been brought against him! In what court under heaven would such injustice be tolerated in a common cause? Yet was this passed over without any testimony of disapprobation, either from the judge, or from any of his attendants!

And do we not here see how the rights of God's people are trampled on by all who choose to persecute and oppress them? Yes verily, the most injurious treatment may be shewn to them, and none will stand up to vindicate their cause. They are neither judged, nor protected, by the same laws as other men. Against a godly man, acting for his Lord and Saviour,

[a] Dan. vi. 4, 5. [b] Luke xi. 54. [c] 2 Cor. xi. 12.

Saviour, any one may rise, and may insult and injure him, not only with impunity, but with the approbation of many; whilst, if the very same line of conduct were pursued by a professor of godliness against a man of this world, a fire would be kindled in every breast, and a general indignation excited against the offending person. We cannot descend to particulars; but the observation of every man may furnish them in abundance: and, if any one be acquainted with instances of such licentious violence, we desire him only to look at the means which are used to cramp the efforts of the godly, and to arrest the progress of vital godliness; and then to ask himself, What he would think of religious persons, if they were to adopt such measures against the opposers of the Gospel as the opposers of the Gospel adopt towards them? And we will venture to say, that a very few minutes' consideration shall convince him, that "those who are born after the flesh do still persecute those who are born after the Spirit," and that the descendants of Cain, of Ishmael, and of Doeg, are not by any means extinct.]

3. With hypocritical pretences—

[This officer professed a high regard for order and decorum; but a greater act of indecorum can scarcely be conceived than that which he himself committed at that very time; since the taking for granted that the judge who sat there, to administer justice, would suffer all the rights of justice to be so violated in his very presence, was as severe a reflection upon the judge as could well be cast upon a human Being. Yet this was the man who complained of a want of order and decorum in our blessed Lord, and made that a plea for the outrage which he himself committed. What hypocrisy was here! yet it is no other than what is practised every day by those who hate the Gospel, and labour to obstruct its progress. Need we go to Rome to hear the plea, that, from the labours of Christ's faithful servants, the Church is in danger? With what sanctimonious zeal will many cry out against Lectures on a Sabbath evening, as injurious to morality; whilst they never lift up a voice against the Theatres, in which so much iniquity abounds! And what concern will many express about the peace of men's minds as disturbed by the Gospel, when they have never, on any occasion whatever, shewn any regard for the spiritual interests of others, or even for the welfare of their own souls! I mean not to say, that the welfare of the Church, and the interests of morality, and the peace of men's minds, ought to be deemed of small importance; for they ought, beyond a doubt, to be regarded with the utmost care and tenderness: but this I say, that they are not uncommonly made a pretext for opposing religion, by persons

persons who on any other occasion would shew no regard for them at all. Rather than not prevail to destroy the Lord Jesus, the Jews would cry out, "If thou let this man go, thou art not Cesar's friend:" when they would not have hesitated to throw off Cesar's yoke at any moment, if they could have attempted it with any prospect of success[d]. Their loyalty was but a pretext; their only object being to insure the condemnation of one, whose innocence the very judge himself had repeatedly proclaimed. The truth is, that the godly are a prey, which every man is at liberty to hunt down; and in the taking of which he is at liberty to use any means which his ingenuity may devise[e].]

But whilst in the conduct of the Jews we see how religion is opposed, we see, in the conduct of our Lord,

II. How it is to be maintained—

None of the weapons which are made use, of by the enemies of religion are to be employed by its friends. If they contend with evil, we are to contend with good, and to "overcome evil with good." The cause of Christ must be maintained,

1. With undaunted firmness—

[Our blessed Lord was not intimidated by this rude assault; but, as one who felt that he was possessed of a good conscience, and a good cause, he firmly expostulated with his adversary: "If I have done evil, bear witness of the evil; but if well, why smitest thou me?" Now this shews us, that we are not called to submit to injuries without maintaining that we have still the same rights as other men, and that, when those rights are violated, we have just reason to complain. St. Paul, when a Roman Centurion had bound him with thongs, and was about to scourge him, asserted his right, as a Roman citizen, to be regarded as innocent, till his guilt had been proved in a court of justice[f]: and at another time, after having been unjustly beaten and imprisoned, he would not leave the prison till the magistrates, who had so treated him, should "come to fetch him out[g]." Thus we may avoid injuries when no sacrifice of conscience is required: but, rather than violate, in any instance, our duty to God, we must brave all the injuries that can be inflicted on us. The Hebrew youths have set us an excellent example in this respect. When menaced with being cast into the fiery furnace, they expressed their confidence in God, that he would interpose

[d] Ch. xix. 12.
[e] Isai. lix. 15.
[f] Acts xxii. 25.
[g] Acts xvi. 37.

interpose for their deliverance: but whether such an interposition should be vouchsafed or not, they were determined to hold fast their integrity at all events: "Our God will deliver us. But, if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods[h]." No trials whatever should at any time drive us from this point. Whatever persecutions may arise, we must say with Paul, "None of these things move me; neither count I my life dear unto myself." In a word, we must "not fear man, who can only kill the body; but fear Him alone, who can destroy both body and soul in hell[i]."]

2. With unruffled patience—

[Though our Lord's answer was firm, there was not the smallest degree of irritation in it. And herein he shewed how superior he was to any mortal man. Moses was the meekest man upon the face of the earth; yet, when greatly tried, he broke forth into unadvised expressions, which brought the displeasure of God upon him[k]. And when Paul was injured precisely in the same way that Jesus was, he resentfully addressed the judge that had so injured him; "God shall smite thee, thou whited wall: for sittest thou to judge me after the law, and commandest me to be smitten contrary to the law[l]?" Our duty in all circumstances is to imitate "the meekness and gentleness of Christ," who, as St. Peter informs us, "suffered for us, leaving us an example, that we should follow his steps; who, being reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously[m]." If we betray any unhallowed temper, our adversaries have so far gained a victory over us. We must, under all circumstances, "possess our souls in patience;" and "let patience have its perfect work, that we may be perfect and entire, lacking nothing."]

From the whole then we may LEARN,

1. What to expect—

["The servant must not expect to be above his lord." "If men called the master of the house Beelzebub, much more will they those of his household." Our blessed Lord strongly guards us upon this very point: "Marvel not," says he, "if the world hate you: if it hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you. If ye were of the world, the world would love its own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you[n]." Nor is it mere hatred that we must expect to encounter, but injuries also, yes, and injuries of the most atrocious kind. "If we will live godly in Christ Jesus, we shall assuredly

[h] Dan. iii. 18. [i] Luke xii. 4, 5. [k] Numb. xx. 10—12.
[l] Acts xxiii. 2, 3. [m] 1 Pet. ii. 21—23. [n] John xv. 18—20.

assuredly suffer persecution." Let us then "count the cost;" and be ready to pay it. "The pearl of great price" is worth it all.]

2. How to act—

[Let us set our Lord Jesus Christ before us as our example. "He, when oppressed and afflicted, opened not his mouth: he was brought as a sheep to the slaughter; and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so opened he not his mouth[o]." Oh, blessed attainment! how rare! how beautiful! "To turn the left cheek to him who smites us on the right! to let a man who sues us at the law, and takes away our coat, take away with him our cloke also! and when compelled to go with a man one mile, to accompany him voluntarily another[p]!" What hard sayings are these to the carnal man! and how difficult to be carried into execution, even by the most spiritual! But, Beloved, let us not despair of attaining these things; for "the grace of Christ is sufficient for us;" and we may rest assured, that, if only we "be strong in him," we shall "be able to do all things through Christ who strengtheneth us." And it is but a little time that we shall be called to these sacrifices. Soon we shall be beyond the reach of all our adversaries: having "suffered with Christ, and overcome through him, we shall soon be glorified together, and sit down with him upon his throne, as he overcame, and is set down with his Father upon his throne[q]."]

[o] Isai. liii. 6. [p] Matt. v. 39—41.
[q] Rom. viii. 17. Rev. iii. 21.

DCCCXXXVIII.

CHRIST'S GOOD CONFESSION.

John xviii. 37. *Pilate therefore said unto him, Art thou a king then? Jesus answered, Thou sayest that I am a king. To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth. Every one that is of the truth, heareth my voice.*

IN the whole of our Saviour's life there was a strong apparent contradiction between the character he professed, and that which he visibly sustained. At his introduction into the world he was announced as a most exalted personage, even as "the King of the Jews[a];" yet was he found born in a stable, and laid in a manger. When he entered triumphantly into

[a] Luke ii. 11, 12.

into Jerusalem, and was welcomed with loud hosannas as the Son of David, he did not assume the pomp of earthly monarchs, but rode thither, in a meek and lowly manner, seated on a young ass[b]. But this opposition between his mean appearance and his high pretensions never was more visible than when he stood before the bar of Pilate. He was like any other poor man; except indeed that he was bound as a criminal, and held by his whole nation as more execrable than even a robber or a murderer: yet at this time did he assert his claim to kingly authority, or, as St. Paul expresses it, "witnessed a good confession before Pontius Pilate[c]."

In his answer to Pilate, there are two things to be considered;

I. His confession—

The Jews had already condemned him, for making himself the Son of God[d]. But he could not be executed, unless Pilate also should condemn him. But Pilate did not regard any questions relating to the Jewish law; and therefore the Jews brought a different charge against him before Pilate; affirming that he had set up himself as a King against Cesar. On this charge Pilate questioned him, and received the answer which we have just read.

In this answer we notice,

1. The boldness of it—

[Our Lord had already told Pilate, that he disclaimed any idea of establishing an earthly kingdom; and that there was no ground for fear or jealousy, as if he was invading the rights of Cesar, or attempting to rescue his country from the Roman yoke. He appealed to the prohibition which he had just before given to his Disciples respecting their using the sword in his defence; and declared, that the kingdom to which he aspired was not of a worldly nature; not established on worldly principles, nor supported by worldly force, nor governed by worldly policy, nor in any respect interfering with the interests of other monarchs. Yet even in thus rectifying the misapprehensions of Pilate, he *thrice* used the words, "My kingdom." He might have satisfied himself with simply denying

[b] Zech. ix. 9. with Matt. xxi. 2—9. [c] 1 Tim. vi. 13.
[d] Matt. xxvi. 63—65.

denying his interference with human governments: but he would on no account conceal what it was of importance to the world to know: and therefore, though he foresaw all the consequences of his confession, he answered plainly to the next interrogation, "Thou sayest truly; I am a King."]

2. The truth of it—

[The Prophets had abundantly testified of the regal dignity of the Messiah[e]———and in the New Testament it had been confirmed by the testimony both of men and angels[f]. The very works also which he had wrought, bore witness to him[g]. The difference which subsisted between his government and earthly kingdoms, so far from invalidating his claim, served only to establish it on the firmest basis: for, whereas other kings had dominion only over the bodies of men, he reigned over their souls: others had their territories bounded by seas or mountains; but his extended over all the earth.]

But we shall have a further insight into the truth of his confession, while we consider,

II. His explanation of it—

The connexion between the two parts of our Lord's answer is not obvious at first sight: but, on comparing them with attention, we shall find, that in the latter he explains,

1. The manner in which he exercises his kingly office—

[Satan is "the god of this world," "the prince that ruleth in all the Children of disobedience[h]." He has usurped a power over the whole race of mankind, and he governs them all as his vassals[i].

Now Jesus has not, like other kings, any persons who are his subjects *by birth*: every one of his subjects is rescued from under the dominion of Satan, and constrained to submit to him.

But with what weapons does our blessed Lord invade the kingdom of Satan? not with those which are used in earthly wars, but with the force of truth. It is by darkness and falsehood that Satan retains men in his service; and it is by the light of truth that Christ delivers them from their bondage. Satan makes men believe that "God is even such an one as themselves;" that they have no reason to fear his displeasure; that their own good works or repentance will save them; and that it is sufficient for them to maintain a moral and

[e] Isai. ix. 6, 7. Dan. ii. 44. & vii. 13, 14. & ix. 25. & Ps. lxxii. 1, 11.
[f] Matt. ii. 2. Luke i. 32, 33. [g] John x. 25.
[h] 2 Cor. iv. 4. Eph. ii. 2. [i] 2 Tim. ii. 26.

and decent conduct. Our blessed Lord, on the contrary, proclaims that God is a just and holy Being; that sinners are obnoxious to his wrath; that there is no reconciliation with God but through him; and that they who would be happy in the next world, must now devote themselves wholly to the service of their God. It had been foretold that He should be "a witness to the people[k]:" and he came agreeably to the prediction, "to bear witness to the truth." "For this very end was he born;" and by executing this office, he prevailed, and still does prevail, on thousands to renounce their allegiance to Satan, and to "take upon them his light and easy yoke."]

2. The distinguishing character of his subjects—

[Those are said to be "of the truth," who have been begotten, or converted, by it: just as those are said to be "of God," who have been born of God[l]. Now every one that has experienced the influence of truth in "bringing him out of darkness into light," and "in translating him from the power of Satan into the kingdom of God's dear Son[m]," from that time "hears the voice of Christ," and obeys it without reserve. "Other lords had dominion over him before:" the world governed him by its maxims; the flesh captivated him by its allurements; the devil enslaved him by his temptations: but from henceforth he will not listen to the Syren voice of pleasure, or regard the calls of interest or reputation: he has sworn allegiance to the Lord Jesus Christ; and for him he is determined to sacrifice every other consideration.

This designates the character of Christ's subjects. Wherever such persons are found, these are the subjects of his kingdom. Other kings exercise their sway over those only who are born in a particular country: but in whatever country these persons live, they belong to Christ; to Christ supremely, to Christ only. All other authorities are subservient to his; and are to be obeyed so far only as shall be agreeable to his laws, and conducive to his honour.

At the same time, none are his subjects, who do not correspond with the character here given. Whatever they may profess, they are not his: they may call themselves Christians; but he calls them traitors, rebels, enemies.]

ADDRESS,

1. Those who never yet submitted to Christ's government—

[Whose are *ye*? There are but two monarchs, who divide the whole world between them; and these are, Christ and Satan. If then you have never been smitten with that "two-edged

[k] Isai. lv. 4. [l] Compare Jam. i. 18. with 1 John iii. 19.
[m] 1 Pet. ii. 9. Col. i. 13.

"two-edged sword, the word of truth;" if you have never been so deeply wounded, that nothing but the "balm of Gilead" could heal you; if you have never cast down the arms of your rebellion, and surrendered up yourselves to Christ, we must say of you, as Christ himself did of the Jews, "Ye are of your father the devil[n]." And if you are Satan's vassals, from whom, and with whom, must you expect your reward? Let this question come home to your hearts; and choose ye this day "whose ye will be, and whom ye will serve[o]."]

2. Those who are afraid to yield themselves up to Christ—

[Alas! that any should be deterred by fear or shame from acknowledging Christ; when he braved even the most cruel death, rather than deny the office which he bore for us! What can be your loss or pain, when compared with his? What the contempt poured upon you, when compared with the accursed death of the cross to which he submitted for your sakes? Perhaps you expect to be acknowledged as his subjects, though you shun the odium of acknowledging him as your king. But this cannot be; for those who deny him shall be denied by him; and those only who confess him, shall be confessed by him in the presence of his Father, and of his holy angels[p].]

3. Those who call themselves his subjects—

[What our heavenly King said of himself, may be fitly applied to all his subjects; "For this end were ye born, and for this cause came ye into the world, that ye should bear witness unto the truth." Ye are to be God's witnesses in the world: "ye are to be as lights," and "as a city set on a hill." Let it appear then that "the truth has made you free[q]." Let it be seen in you, that truth will rectify, not only the errors of the mind, but the propensities of the heart; and that, when it is "mighty through God, it will bring every thought and desire into captivity to the obedience of Christ[r]."]

[n] John viii. 44. [o] Josh. xxiv. 14. [p] Matt. x. 32, 33.
[q] John viii. 32. [r] 2 Cor. x. 4, 5.

DCCCXXXIX.

PILATE'S INQUIRY ABOUT TRUTH.

John xviii. 38. *Pilate saith unto him, What is truth?*

THE rich and powerful are for the most part under great disadvantages for the attainment of

religious knowledge. Their appointed teachers too often "prophesy smooth things to them;" and those who would deal faithfully with their consciences, are kept at a distance from them. Their dispositions and habits also are generally unfavourable for the reception of truth: and hence it is, that if they have an opportunity of gaining instruction, they rarely avail themselves of it, so as to derive any essential benefit to their souls[a]. Herod heard John the Baptist; but "knew not how to use the price put into his hand." Festus, and Agrippa, and Felix were variously affected with the preaching of Paul; but no one of them was savingly converted unto God. Pilate, as Governor of Judæa, had Christ himself brought before him, for the express purpose of examining into his pretensions to the kingdom of Israel: and when our Lord had informed him what kind of a kingdom it was that he claimed, and that he came into the world to bear witness to the truth, Pilate asked him, "What is truth?" Happy man, who made such an inquiry; and who had one before him so capable of giving him instruction respecting it! Surely this man could not fail of being saved. But, alas! he waited not for an answer. We do not apprehend that he put the question contemptuously, as though he had said, "Why do you talk to me about *truth?*" The notice which the Evangelist takes of his question, gives us reason to think that it was intended seriously; though the event shewed, that he was not sufficiently anxious to obtain the information which he had professed to desire. However, the question was important; and, had his mind been duly impressed with its importance, we should have had to number him among the followers, rather than the enemies, of that despised Nazarene.

For our present improvement, we shall endeavour to state—

I. The importance of the inquiry—.

Truth is of various kinds, physical, moral, and religious. By physical truth, we mean that which comprehends all the phenomena of nature: by moral truth,

[a] 1 Cor. i. 20.

truth, that which relates to the whole system of morals, independent of religion. That an inquiry into these is important, appears from its having been the employment of all wise men from the beginning of the world; and from the value that has been set even on the smallest measures of truth which have, by means of the most patient and laborious investigations, been at any time brought to light. But religious truth, and that especially of which our Lord came to testify, is, beyond all comparison, more important than any other. What that truth is, we will state in few words. The point upon which our blessed Lord was examined before the Jewish Council, was, "Art thou the Christ?" and that before Pilate, was, "Art thou the King of the Jews?" To both of these he answered in the affirmative, "I am." Now these two points comprise all that truth, respecting which our blessed Lord came to testify: first, *He is the anointed Saviour of the world;* and, secondly, *He is the King and Governor of all whom he saves. This* is truth: *this* is the sum and substance of the Gospel: there is nothing connected with the justification, the sanctification, or the complete and everlasting salvation of mankind, which is not comprehended in *this*. Consequently, an inquiry into *this* must be of the very first importance.

It is important,

1. For the forming of our principles—

[Man without a principle is like a ship without a rudder, driven by every wave of temptation, and every gust of passion. He has nothing whereby to judge of good and evil in matters of the greatest moment; no standard, to which he can refer a doubtful opinion; no touchstone, by which he can try a specious sentiment.

But whither can a man go for the forming of his principles? If he apply to Heathen philosophers, he finds nothing fixed, nothing certain, nothing wherein they are generally agreed. Even the question, "What is the chief good of man?" he finds unsettled; and can obtain no clue that can lead him to any definitive judgment.

But in the Gospel, all his doubts are solved. There he sees, that love to Christ as his Saviour, and obedience to him as his King, are to be the main-spring, which must set every wheel

wheel in motion. Whatever accords with the principle of love to him, and with the rule of his revealed will, is good; and whatever deviates from the one or other, even if it be only an hair's breadth, is wrong. To this standard every feeling of the heart, and every expression of it in act, may be referred; and, *if rightly referred*, be infallibly determined.]

2. For the regulating of our conduct—

[As the principles of the greatest philosophers were involved in doubt and uncertainty, so were they altogether destitute of any sanctifying influence: they wrought no change on the morals of men; they produced no consistent change even on their own morals. Even Christianity itself, *if there be not a direct and constant reference in the mind to that particular truth spoken of in the text*, will not prevail to the renovating of the soul. Of this we have decisive evidence in the lives of nominal Christians; who, though they have a higher standard of morals than the Heathens, are strangers to that heavenliness of mind, which characterizes a real saint.

But the knowledge of this truth will bring, not the actions only, but even "the thoughts, into captivity to the obedience of Christ." The truth, cordially embraced, will operate as fire on metal, pervading the whole soul, and transforming it, as it were, into its own image[b].]

3. For the saving of the soul—

[Whatever God may do in a way of uncovenanted mercy, (respecting which, as there is nothing revealed, it were presumptuous to speak;) men ignorant of the Gospel are invariably represented as in a state of guilt and condemnation. "If our Gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are *lost*." Indeed, the very circumstance of "Christ's coming into the world on purpose to bear witness to the truth," and his submitting to the accursed death of the cross in confirmation of that truth, is proof sufficient, that the knowledge of the truth is essential to our happiness, and that every living creature is bound to inquire into it.]

The objects and reasons of our inquiry being thus defined, we proceed to notice,

II. The manner in which it should be made—

Here Pilate was greatly defective: and, in marking his defects, we are unavoidably led to the manner in which such an inquiry should be made:

1. With seriousness—

[Some will inquire about religion with as much levity as

[b] See the want and the attainment of it contrasted: Eph. iv. 17—24.

as if it were quite a trifling concern: they have nothing in view but the gratifying of their curiosity. They resemble the Jews who came to converse with Paul when he was a prisoner at Rome; "We desire to hear of thee what thou thinkest[c]:" or those who ridiculed the doctrine of the resurrection; "We will hear thee again of this matter[d]:" or those foolish women, of whom we read, that they were "ever learning, but never able to come to the knowledge of the truth[e]." But religion is a serious matter; and in our inquiries respecting it we should remember, that on our acceptance or rejection of the truth our everlasting welfare depends ———]

2. With candour—

[While some are light and trifling, others make inquiries only that they may carp and cavil at the word. Such were the Herodians, the Sadducees, and Pharisees of old, who brought forth their respective difficulties, merely to ensnare Jesus, and entangle him in his talk[f]: and such were those also, who "urged him vehemently to speak of many things, that they might find something whereof to accuse him[g]." But we should rather imitate the Beræans, who, instead of determining at once that all which they heard from time to time was folly and delusion, "searched the Scriptures daily, to find whether things were as they had been represented to them" ———]

3. With humility—

[There are many things revealed to us in the Gospel which are contrary to the generally prevailing opinions of mankind: "they are even foolishness unto the natural man; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." In order to understand them aright, we must receive them simply on the authority of God; and conclude them to be true, because he has revealed them. We must beg of him "the gift of his Holy Spirit, that we may know the things which are freely given to us of God:" for then only shall we know him, when "he gives us an understanding to know him," and reveals his dear Son in our hearts as the hope of glory. If we are so wise that we will not seek instruction from him, God will "take us in our own craftiness" ———]

4. With diligence—

[It is not a transient or superficial inquiry that will suffice: we must "search for Wisdom, and dig for her as for hid treasures." We must not presently give over the pursuit, because we find that we have not attained; the promise is,

[c] Acts xxviii. 22. [d] Acts xvii. 32. [e] 2 Tim. iii. 7.
[f] Matt. xxii. 15—17, 23—28, 34—36. [g] Luke xi. 53, 54.

is, "Then shall ye know, if *ye follow on* to know the Lord." There are in the Gospel heights and depths which cannot be explored: and therefore, however deep our acquaintance may be with this stupendous mystery, we should still "not count ourselves to have attained," but still "give attendance to reading," and pray, "Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law!" — — —]

5. With a determination to embrace whatever we may find to be agreeable to the mind and will of God —

[This is the main point: "If we will do God's will, we shall know of the doctrine whether it be of him." If we will not receive the truth in the love of it, God will give us over to believe a lie, in order to our more aggravated condemnation[h]. To receive it speculatively will be to no purpose: for it were better to be wholly ignorant of it, than to "hold it in unrighteousness," or turn from it after having once professed to embrace it[i] — — —]

ADDRESS,

[As Pilate asked of Jesus, "What is truth?" so you are come hither professedly to make the same inquiry. Behold then, in Christ's stead we answer your inquiry: *This* is truth; that Jesus is the Christ; and that his people look unto him as the Saviour of the world. *This* is truth; that Jesus is also the King of Israel; and that all who are his submit to his government — — — — Now go not away, as Pilate did, regardless of your own question; but reflect upon it; consider its importance; meditate on the answer given to it; and examine your own hearts, how far you understand it, how far you feel it, and how far your lives are conformed to it. "If you know the truth, it will make you free:" and if it do not "sanctify you" in this world, it can never profit you in the world to come."]

[h] 2 Thess. ii. 10—12.
[i] Rom. i. 18. Heb. vi. 4—6. 2 Pet. ii. 21.

DCCCXL.

PILATE'S FURTHER ATTEMPT TO SAVE JESUS.

John xix. 5. *Then came Jesus forth, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. And Pilate saith unto them, Behold the man!*

IT is common to speak of our fallen nature as *altogether*

altogether corrupt, and destitute of *any* good thing. But this must be understood with caution: for though it is true that there is nothing *really* and *spiritually* good in the natural man, (as Paul says, "In me, that is, in my flesh, dwelleth no good thing,") yet there is a principle of conscience, which, in proportion as it is enlightened, deters men from evil, and prompts them to what is good. Of this we have many examples in the holy Scriptures; and a very striking one in the passage before us. Pilate was persuaded in his mind that Jesus was innocent, and therefore could not endure the thought of putting him to death. He strove by every means in his power to pacify those who sought his life: a great many different times he bore witness to his innocence; and, when that would not succeed, he laboured in a variety of ways to release him. He offered to inflict upon him the punishment of scourging, under the idea that his enemies would be satisfied with that: and now, after having inflicted that punishment, and permitted him to be treated with every species of indignity, he had recourse to one more device, in hopes that he should at last prevail upon them to spare him. He brought forth Jesus, arrayed as he was in mock majesty, and his face defiled with blood and spitting; and said unto the people, "Behold the man!"

This may be viewed,

I. As a political expedient—

Pilate, not daring absolutely to refuse the demands of the Jews, yet still bent on effecting the release of Jesus, had recourse to this,

1. To excite their pity—

[He well knew that the most savage heart, however insensible to the cries of misery when heard only at a distance, is apt to relent, when the suffering object is presented before the eyes. He therefore set Jesus before them in this state; hoping thereby, that they would be moved with compassion at the sight of his unmerited distresses. Pilate's address to them was probably to this effect: "Behold the man whose crucifixion you have demanded: I have already repeatedly told you that I could find in him nothing worthy of death: but, as I take

take for granted that you have some cause for your complaints, I have examined him by scourging; yet I am still constrained to renew my testimony, that I can find in him no fault at all. Supposing however that he has in some respect offended against your law, I can assure you he has already suffered severely for it; and therefore I hope you will be satisfied, without urging me to proceed any further against him. Look, and see what a pitiable object he is: and let your anger give way to the nobler sentiments of pity and compassion."

Well might Pilate adopt this expedient, because Christ himself is represented as pleading in this very manner with his relentless persecutors[a], though, alas! without attaining the object of his desires[b].]

2. To shame their enmity—

[The nation had accused Jesus of stirring up rebellion in the land. Now Pilate hoped, that a sight of him in his present deplorable state would convince them, that there was nothing to fear from him on this head: for the meekness with which he had borne all his sufferings shewed clearly, that he was not of a turbulent disposition; and the circumstance of his not having a single friend or partizan to speak for him, proved, that, whatever his inclination might be, he had not the power to do harm. "Look at him," we may suppose Pilate to say: "see what a contemptible appearance he makes! Is this a man of whom the whole nation has cause to be afraid? Is this a man of whose power and influence you need to be so jealous, that you cannot rest till he is put to death? Supposing that he has had some influence, what will he have in future? Only let him alone, and in a little time it will scarce be known that such a poor despised creature exists."

Such were the arguments with which David had repeatedly appeased the murderous wrath of Saul[c]. And Pilate might reasonably hope that they would have weight, especially when addressed to them by the Judge and Governor, whose exclusive duty it was to watch over the interests of the state. But, alas! the chief priests and scribes, who had acted covertly before, now took the lead in clamour and tumult, and bore down all before them. Nothing but the crucifixion of Jesus would satisfy them; and they gave Pilate to understand, that, if he did not comply with their wishes in this respect, they would denounce him as an enemy to Cesar, and a traitor to his own country[d].]

There is yet another view in which we may regard the words of Pilate; namely,

II. As

[a] Lam. i. 12. [b] Ps. lxix. 20.
[c] 1 Sam. xxiv. 14. & xxvi. 20. [d] ver. 6, 12.

II. As a prophetic intimation—

It is well known that Caiaphas, when intending nothing himself but to recommend the execution of Jesus as necessary for the good of the state, unwittingly uttered a prophecy respecting the saving benefits of his death, and *that* not to the Jews only, but to all the world[e]. Now the words of Pilate bear much more of a prophetic aspect than those of Caiaphas, since they accord with many acknowledged prophecies, not in spirit merely, but almost in the express terms[f]. Moreover, Pilate's wife had had somewhat of a revelation respecting Jesus that very morning, and had sent word of it to Pilate, whilst he was yet upon the seat of judgment[g]: and he himself had invariably, and with great constancy, borne testimony to the innocency of Jesus: so that his words on this occasion might well bear that kind of construction which God himself has taught us to put upon the words of Caiaphas. But, as the Scripture *affirms* nothing respecting this, so neither do *we*: we may however, with great propriety, put these words into the mouth of a Christian preacher, and take occasion from them to lead you to the contemplation of your suffering Lord. I say then, "Behold the man!" Behold him,

1. To engage your confidence

[To a superficial inquirer, all these humiliating circumstances would appear to justify a doubt whether Jesus were the Son of God. But to one who examines thoroughly the prophecies relating to him, these very circumstances afford the most satisfactory proof that he was indeed the Christ. Was he treated with the utmost contempt, and that too by the whole nation? Was he mocked, reviled, spit upon? Was he beaten with scourges, so that his flesh was even plowed up with stripes? Then I see that he was the Christ; for not only the antient Prophets, but he himself expressly told us that it should be so[h]. Did he endure all these things without

[e] John xi. 49—52.
[f] Isai. xl. 9. & xlv. 22. & lxv. 1. & Zech. xii. 10.
[g] Matt. xxvii. 19.
[h] Compare Isai. xlix. 7. & l. 6. & liii. 3—5. & Ps. cxxix. 3. with Mark x. 32—34.

out one word of murmur or complaint? Then I am sure that he was the Christ[i].

But it is not in this view only that his sufferings afford us grounds of confidence. Whilst they prove him to be the true Messiah, they prove also, beyond a possibility of doubt, his willingness to save *all* who come unto him. In enduring all these things, he submitted willingly. He could, if he had chosen, have had more than twelve legions of angels for his defence: but then the Scriptures would not have been fulfilled, nor would the work of our salvation have been accomplished. If then he willingly submitted to these indignities for us when we were enemies, what will he not do for us when we throw down the weapons of our rebellion, and implore his mercy? Surely no person, whatever he may have been or done, shall ever apply to him in vain———]

2. To inflame your gratitude—

It is well said by the Apostle, that "the love of Christ passeth knowledge." It is not possible for any finite mind to comprehend it. Something of it indeed "every saint may comprehend[k];" but its full extent can never be explored. That however which we do see of it, should operate with irresistible energy upon our minds. Brethren, "behold the man!" See the royal robe, which they have put upon him; the cane in his hand, for a sceptre; the crown of thorns upon his head; and the blood issuing from his lacerated temples: see him ready to faint through the severities inflicted on him; and then say, These are the fruits of his love to me; these things he endures, to rescue me from "everlasting shame and contempt." Then ask yourselves, What returns he merits at your hands? Surely to compliment him with the name of Saviour, will not be thought sufficient: there must be a tribute, not of the lip only, but of the heart; in the heart a flame of love should be kindled, which, like the fire upon the altar, should never go out———]

3. To stimulate your exertions—

[There is no one so blind as not to see that our acknowledgments to Christ should shew themselves, not in sentiment only, but in action. Indeed he himself tells us, that it is by obedience to his commands we are to prove our love to him[l]. What then shall we do, to evince our love to him? What? Let us follow the example of his love to us. When the people sought him to make him really a king, he refused their services, and hid himself from them: but when they arrayed him in mock majesty, and put a crown of thorns upon his head, he submitted willingly to that, because it would conduce

[i] Isai. liii. 7. with 1 Pet. ii. 33.
[k] Eph. iii. 18, 19.
[l] John xiv. 15, 21. & xv. 14.

duce to our benefit. Thus let us be regardless of all personal gratifications, that we may exalt and honour him: and if we are called to suffer for his sake, let us suffer willingly and meekly. As "he endured the contradiction of sinners against himself," "sustaining the cross and despising the shame" for us, let us "follow him, bearing his reproach." If we be made "a gazing-stock" and "a spectacle to the world," let us be content to be loaded with every species of ignominy for his sake. Let us remember, that "he gave himself for us, to purchase unto himself a peculiar people *zealous of good works;*" and let it be our fixed determination to answer in this respect the end of his sufferings; and, provided "he be magnified in our body," let it be a matter of indifference to us "whether it be by life or by death."]

DCCCXLI.

THE SUPERSCRIPTION AFFIXED TO THE CROSS.

John xix. 19—22. *And Pilate wrote a title, and put it on the cross. And the writing was,* JESUS OF NAZARETH THE KING OF THE JEWS. *This title then read many of the Jews: for the place where Jesus was crucified was nigh to the city: and it was written in Hebrew, and Greek, and Latin. Then said the chief priests of the Jews to Pilate, Write not, The King of the Jews, but that he said, I am King of the Jews. Pilate answered, What I have written, I have written.*

NOTHING was left undone which could add to the sufferings of our blessed Lord. From the tribunal at which he was condemned, he was hurried away to execution, and crucified between two most notorious malefactors, as being himself the vilest of the human race. This however served only to fulfil the Scripture, which had said, "He was numbered with the transgressors." On such occasions it was common to place above the head of the criminal an inscription, by which all the spectators might know both his name, and the crime for which he suffered. This was observed at the crucifixion of our Lord: and (as no circumstance respecting him is uninteresting) we shall call your attention to,

I. The superscription put over him—

This, however intended at first, must certainly be considered by us in a two-fold view;

1. As

1. As an accusation against him—

The principal charge which had been exhibited against him before Pilate, was, that he had professed himself to be "Christ, a King[a]." On this point he had been interrogated by Pilate; and had "witnessed a good confession," acknowledging plainly, that he was a King, though his kingdom was not of this world[b]. Pilate, seeing that this claim did not at all interfere with the temporal government of Cesar, considered it as unworthy his attention; and therefore sought by all possible means to release him. But the chief priests, being determined to prevail, represented this claim of his as an avowed hostility to Cesar; and declared that the protecting of Jesus was nothing less than treason[c]. This terrified Pilate into a compliance with their wishes. He instantly consented to his death; and, according to custom, ordered the crime of which Jesus was accused to be affixed to his cross, in these memorable words, "JESUS OF NAZARETH THE KING OF THE JEWS."]

2. As a testimony in his favour—

[As Caiaphas, when designing only to destroy Jesus, unconsciously declared the extensive benefits which would flow from his death, so Pilate, meaning only to inform the people for what reason Jesus was put to death, unintentionally attested his innocence. Had Jesus *falsely pretended* to be the King of the Jews, he would have been guilty of fraud and imposture: but as he really was what he pretended to be, the title placed over his head was nothing more than a plain truth, containing not only no crime at all, but not even the smallest charge of crime. What could be a stronger testimony in his favour than this?

The testimony itself contained the most important truth that could possibly be affirmed: it declared that Jesus was the King of Israel, that very king predicted in the Prophets[d], even "Messiah the Prince, who should be cut off, not for his own sins[e]," but for the sins of others. And, that it might be universally known, it was written in Hebrew, and Greek, and Latin; (the three languages most known in the world at that time:) so that, in fact, Pilate himself became the first preacher of a crucified Redeemer.]

Whether the precise mode of expressing the accusation was intentional on the part of Pilate, or not, we cannot but wonder at,

II. The

[a] Luke xxiii. 2.
[b] John xviii. 36, 37. & 1 Tim. i. 16.
[c] ver. 12.
[d] Jer. xxiii. 5, 6. Zech. ix. 9.
[e] Dan. ix. 26.

II. The firmness of Pilate in relation to it—

That the superscription would give great offence, we may easily conceive: for the priests, so far from acknowledging Jesus as their King, had got sentence of death pronounced against him for arrogating to himself that honour. They did indeed expect the promised Messiah, and supposed that he would erect a temporal kingdom amongst them; and this very expectation made them feel still more keenly the indignity which this inscription offered them; since it intimated, that any person who should hereafter attempt to rescue them from the dominion of Cesar, should be crucified in like manner.

Without delay they make known to Pilate their wishes upon the subject, and propose an alteration in the words: but behold, he is firm and immoveable: his only answer to them is, "What I have written, I have written."

Now to understand his answer aright, we must consider him,

1. As incensed against them—

[They had urged, and (so to speak) compelled him to give sentence against a man whom he knew to be innocent: and, being condemned in his own conscience, he could not but feel exceedingly displeased with them. The alteration which they proposed in the inscription was very trifling: it might have been made without in the least derogating from his authority: and, no doubt, if he had not been offended with them, he would have readily complied. But to a person irritated, no concession appears trifling. He felt himself injured by them; and therefore would not give way, even for a moment. His pride was hurt; and he determined that he would make them sensible of his displeasure. Hence he not only refused their petition, but expressed his refusal in terms most authoritative, most contemptuous, and most repulsive.]

2. As over-ruled by God—

[Though perfectly free to follow the dictates of his own mind, he was undoubtedly under the influence of God; just as Balaam was, who though of himself disposed to curse Israel, was invariably constrained to bless them[f]. The truth exhibited in that inscription was itself unalterable, and was to be proclaimed to every people of every language under heaven. It

[f] Numb. xxii. 18, 38. & xxiii. 8, 11, 12, 26. & xxiv. 10, 13.

It was the corner-stone on which all mankind were to build their hopes: and therefore God, who had left Pilate to his natural timidity for the crucifying of his Son, now emboldened him to withstand their renewed solicitations, though in a matter of comparatively no importance[g].

Thus it was on that occasion, and thus it ever shall be; "the counsel of the Lord, that shall stand, and he will do all his will." As far as "the wrath of man will praise him," he will suffer it to act; but the remainder of it he will restrain.]

We may NOTICE from hence,

1. What care God will take of his people—

[He permitted his Son to be put to death, because that was necessary for the accomplishment of the Divine purposes in the work of redemption. But he took care that all his enemies should attest his innocence: and where so small a concession as that before us might have counteracted their testimony, he makes a poor shaking reed as firm and immoveable as a rock. Who then will be afraid to trust him? Who will not cheerfully commit his reputation, his interest, yea his very life, into the hands of such an almighty Friend? Know, Beloved, that he is to his people both a sun and a shield; and that whilst he directs and invigorates them by his beams, he will protect and uphold them by his power ——— "The Lord reigneth, let the earth rejoice, and the multitude of the Isles be glad thereof."]

2. In what way they must attain to his kingdom—

[That which is the highest privilege of the saints may be made the strongest article of accusation against them. In the primitive times, to be a Christian was to expose oneself to all manner of calumny and danger. And thus at this time, to be numbered with the saints is to be classed with enthusiasts, fools, and hypocrites. A man need have no other inscription over his head than, "This is one of the saints," and he shall never want for contempt and hatred. Let him call himself "a King," and men will be ready to cry out, "Crucify him! crucify him!" But this should not discourage us: it is the way the Saviour trod before us. We, like him, are kings[h]; we have a crown and "a kingdom given to us[i]:" and in due time shall be "seated with Christ on his throne, even as he now sitteth on his Father's throne[k]." But we must "suffer with him, if we would reign with him[l]." Even he, "though a Son, was made perfect through sufferings;" and we also must "go through much tribulation, before we can enter into the kingdom of heaven[m]." Let us then consider what he endured for

[g] Acts iv. 27, 28. [h] Rev. i. 6. [i] Luke xxii. 29.
[k] Rev. iii. 21. [l] 2 Tim. ii. 12. [m] Acts xiv. 22.

for us; and "let us arm ourselves with the same mind[n]:" and let us rest assured, that, "if we suffer with him, we shall also be glorified together[o]."]

[n] 1 Pet. iv. 1. [o] Rom. viii. 17.

DCCCXLII.

CASTING LOTS FOR OUR LORD'S VESTURE.

John xix. 23, 24. *Then the soldiers, when they had crucified Jesus, took his garments, and made four parts, to every soldier a part; and also his coat: now the coat was without seam, woven from the top throughout: they said therefore among themselves, Let us not rend it, but cast lots for it, whose it shall be: that the Scripture might be fulfilled, which saith, They parted my raiment among them, and for my vesture they did cast lots. These things therefore the soldiers did.*

ON reading the history of our blessed Lord, we cannot but be struck with the extreme simplicity with which the most important circumstances of it are related. The historians never go out of their way to impress things on our minds; but leave truth to speak for itself. Even when they come to the last scene of his life, where we might have expected them to dilate upon his sufferings in order to affect our hearts, they pass over the whole transaction without a comment, and content themselves with barely mentioning the fact, that "he was crucified." But, while they seem almost unfeeling towards their Divine Master, they specify very minutely those occurrences which marked the accomplishment of prophecy: and, as if indifferent about the agonies which he was enduring, they descend to tell us, how the soldiers who had nailed him to the cross occupied themselves in the disposal of his garments. We should be ready to disregard this record as uninteresting and uninstructive: but no circumstance that took place at that time should be uninteresting to us; nor will this, if duly considered, be uninstructive. On the contrary, this very record will give us an insight into some of the deepest points that can be offered to our consideration.

It

It will give us an insight into,

I. The nature of prophecy—

[Prophecy springs not from man's conjectures, but from a Divine revelation[a]. The Prophets, so far from being the source and authors of their own predictions, could not even understand them, any farther than they were illuminated by that very Spirit by whose immediate agency they were inspired[b]. In some cases they were not even conscious that they foretold any thing[c]. Perhaps this was the case much more frequently than is generally supposed. Through the greatest part of the psalm quoted in our text, David spake primarily respecting himself, though in some parts he was "moved by the Holy Ghost" to speak what had no reference at all but to the Messiah, whom he typified. That he did not understand his own expressions, we can have no doubt. He might perhaps be conscious that he was uttering that which should, in some way or other, have its accomplishment in the Messiah: but he had no clue in his own experience to lead him to the interpretation of his own words: he never had his "hands and feet pierced;" much less had he ever his garments disposed of in the way he mentions[d].

Why then, it may be said, did he so express himself, that nobody could understand him, till the event had actually taken place? We answer, It is of the very nature of prophecy to be obscure; yea, it is altogether essential to the designs of prophecy: for suppose a prophecy to be perfectly clear, the friends of religion would be ready to exert themselves to fulfil it, as the enemies of religion would be to counteract it. Thus, if it were not accomplished, the religion which it was to support would be called an imposture; and, if accomplished, its accomplishment would be considered as the effect only of human prudence. This is evident, from what actually took place in relation to the prophecies respecting the kingly office of Christ, and his resurrection. The people who saw that he could feed multitudes with very small provision, and heal the sick of whatever malady they had, and even raise the dead, concluded, that he was the king whom they expected to reign over the whole world; and therefore sought to make him a king by force: nor could he prevent it, but by withdrawing miraculously from their presence. On the other hand, his enemies, who had heard him say that he would rise again the third day, set a guard around his grave on purpose to prevent it. In this manner persons would have acted in reference to all the prophecies, if all had been equally clear: and thus prophecy, as a mean of establishing the true religion, would

[a] 2 Pet. i. 21. [b] 1 Pet. i. 10, 11. [c] John xi. 49—52.
[d] Ps. xxii. 16, 18.

would be superseded by a continued series of miracles; and Christianity would lose its strongest evidence and support.

The true nature of prophecy is not anywhere more clearly seen than in the passage before us: for, till it was accomplished, no human being could understand its import; nor after its accomplishment could any one mistake it.]

II. The origin of Christianity—

[Let any one who imagines Christianity to be a mere human contrivance, ask himself, Whether any person, or set of persons, wishing to impose a religion upon the world, would be foolish enough to predict, that its founder's clothes should be disposed of in so strange a way? The event must be so entirely out of their own power, that they would never subject their imposture to such a test as this. But this event was predicted a thousand years before it came to pass; and the psalm in which it was contained, was universally acknowledged by the Jews to refer to their Messiah.

How then can we account for its accomplishment? Is there any appearance of contrivance in the matter? None at all. The Jews put Christ to death for pretending to be their Messiah; and therefore would not at the same time contrive a plan that should prove him the Messiah. Besides, the thing was not done by Jews, but Heathens; who were perfectly unconscious of doing any thing worthy of attention. If Jesus had not happened to have a particular kind of garment, which was woven without a seam, and had probably been made a present to him by some of those women who ministered unto him, they would have had no more reason for casting lots for that, than for the other which they divided among them. And, after all, he had but just before been stript of his clothing, not only to be scourged, but that, being arrayed in mock majesty, he might be made an object of universal derision; and in that dress had sentence of condemnation been passed upon him: so that, if God had not signally interposed to incline them to put his own garment upon him again, this prophecy had never been fulfilled. See then how minute was the prophecy, and how exact its accomplishment! If they had cast lots at all, the probability was that the whole would have formed but two lots, and that none would be torn in pieces: but as God ordained it to be, so it was; and from thence arises an indisputable evidence, that the religion which was to be confirmed by it, was from God. Indeed, the more insignificant the transaction itself was, the more decisive is the proof arising from it.

In confirmation of this statement we would call your attention to the very words of our text; where the fulfilling of the Scripture is said to be the primary object of that arrangement:

and again it is added, "These things *therefore* the soldiers did." We are not to understand from this, that *the soldiers* had this object in view; (for there was not any thing further from their minds:) but *God inclined their minds* to it for that end. Every thing which the Scriptures had spoken respecting the Messiah, must needs be fulfilled; and *therefore* this, as well as every other point, must be accomplished in him[e].]

III. The government of the universe—

["Known unto God are all his works from the foundation of the world[f]." Nothing was left to chance: but every thing was both foreseen and fore-ordained.

It may be asked then, Are we mere machines? I answer, No. God leaves us free agents; but makes use of our free agency for the accomplishment of his own purposes. This he did in reference to his Son. There was not any thing "done to him, which God's hand, and God's counsel, had not determined before to be done[g]." Nevertheless, all who bore any part in those transactions, were perfectly free in every thing they did. None were *compelled* by any overbearing power; but all followed the bent of their own minds. Judas was actuated by covetousness; the priests by envy; Pilate by fear; and the soldiers, who cast lots for one garment, whilst they divided the other in four parts, acted from a regard to their own personal interests. But God made use of their respective weaknesses for the accomplishment of his own designs.

It is in this manner that God is carrying on his plans on the great theatre of the world. Ambition stimulates one; jealousy restrains another; fear paralyzes, or divisions distract, others: but by all, God works his sovereign will, and renders all the dispositions and pursuits of men subservient to his own eternal purpose. He uses the great conquerors now, precisely as he did Sennacherib of old, for the effecting of his own unerring counsels. "Howbeit, they mean not so, neither doth their heart think so; but it is in their heart to destroy, and cut off nations not a few[h]:" but "they are only his rod, and the staff of his indignation," which he will break and cast into the fire, as soon as they have executed their appointed task[i].

It is thus also that God governs his Church. The very people who most labour to destroy it, are sometimes made unwilling instruments of its enlargement. This was particularly the case in the persecution that took place after the death of Stephen; when God rendered the scattering of the Christians the means of diffusing the knowledge of the Gospel throughout the world[k]. And every individual, if he could trace back all the

[e] Luke xxii. 37. John x. 35.
[f] Acts iv. 28. & xiii. 27, 29. Isai. x. 5, 6, 15, 16.
[g] Acts xv. 18.
[h] Isai. x. 7.
[k] Acts viii. 3, 4.

the events of his former life, would find, that many circumstances, as little connected with religion as the curiosity of Zaccheus[l], or the dishonesty of Onesimus[m], have been overruled by a gracious Providence for good.

How little did these soldiers think of being witnesses for Christ! As little do we think that every thing, however small or casual, is ordered of God, and made a necessary link in the chain of his eternal counsels. To every thing he assigns its proper limit; "Hitherto shalt thou come, but no further." Men devise their way, "but the Lord directeth their steps:" he draws them imperceptibly, but effectually; yet not as stocks and stones, but by means of their own understanding and will: "He draws them with the cords of a man, and with the bands of love[n]."]

It is not however for the formation of *theories* only that this subject is useful: it is equally beneficial in a *practical* view. We may LEARN from it,

1. To adore God for his mercies to us in times past—

[Who is it that has made us to differ from the most abandoned on earth, or the most miserable in hell? Is it not the Lord? and have not many of the occasions on which he has extended mercy to us been as much unsought for, and at the time unnoticed, as if we had been utterly independent of him? Let us remember then to whom we are indebted for all the temporal and spiritual blessings we enjoy: and let every thing be improved by us "for the praise of the glory of his grace"———]

2. To seek his guidance and protection in future—

[Who can tell what consequences may ensue from one single step? perhaps the eternal preservation or ruin of our souls. Assuredly, if left to ourselves one moment, we shall fall and perish. But God sees effects in their causes; and in his eyes eternity itself is but a single point. In his hands then we shall be safe. Whatever enemies may menace our destruction, he will ride in the whirlwind and direct the storm. Only let us not lean to our own understanding, but in all our ways acknowledge him, and he will "never leave us till he has fulfilled all the good things that he has spoken concerning us"———]

3. To submit with cheerfulness to any dispensations, however adverse they may appear—

[Who that recollects the testimony of Joseph after all his multiplied afflictions, will not be ashamed of giving way to impatience

[l] Luke xix. 2—9. [m] Phil. ver. 10—18. [n] Hos. xi. 14.

impatience under trials? "God sent me here before you," says he to his brethren, "to preserve life." Above all, who that reflects on the issue of our Saviour's sufferings, will repine at being made a partaker of them? We have the promises of God on our side, "and the Scripture cannot be broken." We have our appointed measure to fill up, as well as he: and the termination of our trials will resemble his. Let us wait then the Lord's leisure. If we see not distinctly what his design is in this or that affliction, let it suffice, that "what we know not now, we shall know hereafter." We have already seen abundant reason in past times to say, "It is good for me that I have been afflicted:" and the time is coming when we shall say the same in reference to our present trials. We shall see, that they were a necessary link in the chain of Providence, for the advancing of his glory in our salvation.]

DCCCXLIII.

JESUS COMMENDS HIS MOTHER TO JOHN'S CARE.

John xix. 26, 27. *When Jesus therefore saw his mother, and the disciple standing by whom he loved, he said unto his mother, Woman, behold thy son! Then saith he to the disciple, Behold thy mother! And from that hour that disciple took her unto his own home.*

IN the hour of our Lord's crucifixion, when nearly the whole of his Disciples had forsaken him, his female relatives adhered to him, and, together with John the beloved Disciple, preferred the pain and danger of a continued attendance on him, to the repose and safety of a disgraceful flight. To this kindness of theirs the dying Jesus was not insensible. On the contrary, he took that opportunity to secure to his mother a protector through all her remaining days; and to confer on John an honour, which even an angel might well have envied. The transaction, being one of the last in which the Saviour was engaged, demands particular attention. We propose to consider it,

I. As an emblem for our instruction—

Many of our Lord's miracles were certainly intended to shadow forth the spiritual blessings which he came to bestow: and some of his actions also were

were plainly adapted to the same end[a]. We do not indeed assert, that such was the intention of the fact recorded in our text; yet we may without impropriety remark, that it is well calculated to shew,

1. The care which Jesus takes of his suffering people—

[The time was now come, when, according to the prediction of the aged Simeon, "a sword pierced through the soul" of the virgin mother. But Jesus, though in the very agonies of death himself, was mindful of her, and committed her to one, who should supply his place, and be to her as an affectionate and duteous son. His removal from this lower world has in no wise diminished his concern for his afflicted people. As the High Priest of his Church, he is constantly attending to the interests of all its members. He is "not such an high priest as cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities:" in the days of his flesh, "he was in all points tempted like as we are, though without sin[b]:" and since, as well as before his incarnation, "in all our afflictions he is afflicted[c]." Are we in temporal distress? he engages that "bread shall be given us, and our water sure[d]:" and if our wants be of a spiritual nature, he assures us, that he will "never suffer the soul of the righteous to famish[e]," but will make *all* grace abound towards us, that we, "having *always all-sufficiency* in *all* things, may abound unto *every* good work[f]."]

2. The subserviency of the whole creation to his will—

[Without hesitation, John accepted the trust; and no doubt he executed it with fidelity and joy. In like manner the whole creation is ready to obey the command of Christ, and to fulfil his gracious appointments. All the hosts of heaven would, at the first intimation of his will, fly to our relief. The birds of the air would sustain us[g]; the fishes of the sea preserve us[h]; the clouds would supply us with daily nutriment; and the rocks give from their bosoms an unceasing stream for our support[i]. The very enemies of God and his people should open an asylum for us, in obedience to his word; "Let mine outcasts dwell with *thee*, Moab: be *thou* a covert to them from the face of the spoiler[k]." Hence he bids us "to cast our care on him;" and encourages the most destitute

[a] See John ix. 39. & xiii. 8.
[b] Heb. iv. 15.
[c] Isai. lxiii. 9.
[d] Isai. xxxiii. 16.
[e] Prov. x. 3.
[f] 2 Cor. ix. 8.
[g] 1 Kin. xvii. 4.
[h] Jon. i. 17.
[i] Neh. ix. 20.
[k] Isai. xvi. 4.

destitute of mankind to expect from him a seasonable supply of all needful blessings; "Leave thy fatherless children; I will preserve them alive: and let thy widows trust in me[l]."]

Even though the foregoing views should not be thought necessarily connected with the subject, they are profitable in themselves, and are easily deducible from it: but no doubt at all can arise respecting this act of our Lord's,

II. As a pattern for our imitation—

Whatever Jesus did *as the Messiah*, was peculiar to himself; but whatever he did merely *as a man*, that is to be imitated by us; for "he set us an example, that we should follow his steps." His Apostles also we are "to follow, as far as they were followers of him." Now the fact which is here recorded, affords us an excellent pattern,

1. Of filial piety—

[Our Lord, during his youthful days, is particularly spoken of as having been "subject to his parents[m]:" and therein he has set an example to children in every age. But it is not in honouring their parents only, or in obeying their commands, that the duty of children consists: it is no less their duty to make provision for their parents, in case they should by any means be brought into circumstances to need support. This is particularly enjoined by God himself; "If any widow have children, or nephews[n] (grand-children), let *them* learn first to shew piety at home, and to requite their parents: for that is good and acceptable before God[nn]." This duty supersedes charity itself, on a supposition that the two be incompatible with each other: because the support of parents is an act of justice; it is a *return* which we are bound to make for all the care and kindness they exercised towards us in our early days: and the claims of justice can never yield to those of generosity: indeed so indispensable is this duty, that if we do not perform it, we practically "deny the faith, and make ourselves worse than infidels[o]." Moreover we should endeavour, as far as circumstances will admit of it, to make provision for our parents in the event of our own removal; that so we may requite them for all their love to us, whilst we were incapable of the smallest exertion for ourselves. If our parents do not need support from us, we must not on that account imagine that our Lord's example is inapplicable to

[l] Jer. xlix. 11. [m] Luke ii. 51. [n] ἔκγονα. [nn] 1 Tim. v. 4.
[o] 1 Tim. v. 8.

to us; for that example shews equally, that it is our duty to consult the comfort of their minds, as well as the support of their bodies: and I pray God that all young people amongst us may lay this thought to heart! ———]

2. Of Christian love—

[Though John had probably no great abundance for himself, he doubtless thankfully admitted the mother of our Lord to a participation of what he had; regarding her altogether as though she had been his own mother. In this same light should we regard all the sons and daughters of affliction, especially "those who are of the household of faith." What our Lord said of all who did his Father's will, we, for his sake, should say also; "The same is my brother and sister and mother[p]." We should consider the aged, the infirm, the young, the destitute, as having a claim upon us for all the aid that we can reasonably afford them out of the provision which God has made for us. We should look upon our property as a trust committed to our charge, to be improved for God, and to be accounted for to him in the day of judgment. And, if the demands upon us be urgent, we must not on that account give grudgingly or of necessity, but rejoice that God has entrusted us with talents for such a blessed use[q]. As to the comfort arising from such an use of our property, it is beyond all comparison greater than any that can arise from personal indulgence: we intreat all therefore to seek their happiness in making others happy, and to tread in the steps of Him, who impoverished himself that he might enrich us[r], and submitted to the most cruel death that we might inherit eternal life.]

ADDRESS,

1. Those who are afflicted—

[Those who are most dear to the Lord, are often the most afflicted. This was particularly the case with the mother of our Lord: and we are told in general, that "whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth." It is possible too that he may bring us into troubles, from whence there appears not any probable method of escape; but he knows the fittest time to interpose in our behalf. He might have arranged matters for his mother long before, but he would not; because he knew what would be on the whole the fittest season. Thus then let us wait the Lord's leisure, and be strong in faith, giving glory to him: and if at any time we be tempted to fear that

[p] Matt. xii. 50.

[q] If this were the subject of a *Charity Sermon*, the particular claims of the Institution pleaded for might be stated here.

[r] 2 Cor. viii. 9.

that he has forsaken and forgotten us, let us instantly check the dishonourable thought; believing that, though it *is* possible that a mother should forget her sucking child, it is *not* possible that he should ever be unmindful of us[s]: nay, if, like Mary, we be brought into troubles for his sake, we shall receive from him "an hundred-fold in this world, and in the world to come eternal life[t]."]

2. Them that are at ease—

[If you were under the heaviest pressure of affliction yourselves, it would be no reason for being indifferent to the afflictions of others: but if God has been pleased to screen you from trials, you should be the more earnest in "bearing the burthens of others, that you may thereby fulfil the law of Christ[u]." Remember, that sympathy is one of the finest feelings of our nature, and exceedingly fitted to purify us from our remaining dross. Cultivate it then, and value every opportunity of exercising and strengthening that principle in your souls. It is said by Solomon, that "it is better to go to the house of mourning than to the house of feasting:" and this witness is true. Nothing tends more to create in us a thankful heart, than the seeing of the miseries to which others are exposed. Are you then, like John, disciples beloved of their Lord?—endeavour to tread in the steps of John: and if, with Peter, you are confident that you feel in yourselves a love to Christ, then comply with the command of Christ, and "feed his lambs, and feed his sheep[x]."]

[s] Isai. xlix. 14—16. [t] Mark x. 29, 30. [u] Gal. vi. 2.
[x] John xxi. 15—17.

DCCCXLIV.

OUR SAVIOUR'S DEATH.

John xix. 28—30. *After this, Jesus knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the Scripture might be fulfilled, saith, I thirst. Now there was set a vessel full of vinegar: and they filled a spunge with vinegar, and put it upon hyssop, and put it to his mouth. When Jesus therefore had received the vinegar, he said, It is finished: and he bowed his head, and gave up the ghost.*

NOTHING but Divine grace can change the hearts of men. Signs and wonders may alarm and terrify, and may produce a momentary conviction on the mind; but unless the Spirit of God work in and by them, they will leave the soul unhumbled and unrenewed.

renewed. It is probable that the darkness which prevailed during the three last hours of our Saviour's life, produced an awe upon the minds of all; but yet it wrought no permanent change on any: for, when our blessed Lord poured out his complaint respecting the dereliction of his soul, his enemies mocked and insulted him, pretending to understand him as calling Elijah to his aid, when they could not but know that he was crying to his God. *We* might as easily mistake the sense of the words, "My God, My God," as they could mistake the import of "Eli, Eli:" the resemblance of the sounds was merely a pretext for venting the malice that reigned in their hearts. One more opportunity only remained for them to shew the enmity that was in their minds against him; and they gladly embraced it: but in that very conduct they added another testimony to the truth of his Messiahship. Their conduct towards him in this particular had been the subject of prophecy: and, when that prophecy was fulfilled, there remained no further occasion for his continuance in the world: he therefore left the world, and went immediately to the bosom of his Father.

Two things are here presented for our consideration;

I. The completion of prophecy—

There remained now but one prophecy to be accomplished—

[Every thing relating to the incarnation, life, and death, of the Lord Jesus Christ had been foretold in the minutest manner; and every thing, except that which is spoken in our text, had been fulfilled. The drought occasioned by his long and excruciating agonies both of body and mind, and the method used by his enemies to allay his thirst, had been particularly foretold by the Psalmist[a]. To look for the accomplishment of these things in David is in vain. They never were fulfilled in David, or in any other person whatsoever, except the Lord Jesus Christ.]

That prophecy now received its accomplishment in Christ—

[The thirst predicted, came upon him: he complained of

[a] Ps. xxii. 14, 15. & lxix. 21.

of it: and the people filled a spunge with vinegar, and put it, on a stalk of hyssop, to his mouth. The vinegar was there at hand; it being, when mixed with water, the common drink of the Roman soldiers. Before his crucifixion, his friends had offered him a drink of wine mixed with myrrh, as a cordial to support him under his sufferings; or rather as a stupifying potion, to allay his pain. But of *that* he would not drink; because he would endure all that was necessary to make satisfaction to Divine justice for the sins of men[b]. The vinegar was presented to him by his enemies, who had no desire to soothe his anguish, but only to protract the period of his sufferings, and increase their weight. In this, however, they unconsciously fulfilled the prophecy concerning it, and thereby enabled our Lord to say, "It is finished." All was now finished; all that was necessary to be done or suffered for the sins of men — — — — and nothing remained, but to surrender up that life, which had answered all the ends for which it had been given.]

Immediately upon this followed,

II. The dissolution of the Lord—

Two things are here particularly to be noticed;

1. The voluntariness of his death—

[He had before expressly declared, that "no man could take away his life, but that he should lay it down of himself[c]." And here the correspondence between the prediction and the event is clearly marked. Had the separation of his soul and body been occasioned altogether by his sufferings in a natural way, his strength would have gradually decayed, till he had sunk under them: but behold, immediately before his departure he cried out *repeatedly* with a loud voice; shewing thereby, that his nature was not exhausted, but that he resigned his soul voluntarily into his Father's hands[d]. The Centurion, who superintended his execution, was particularly struck with this, and was convinced by it that Jesus was indeed the Son of God, the Saviour of the world[e]. The very terms used by St. Matthew to express his death confirm this idea. What we translate, "He yielded up the ghost," is literally, "He *dismissed* his spirit[f]:" so clearly did he manifest, even in death itself, that he was truly "the Lord and Prince of life[g]."]

2. His confidence and composure—

[Though he had just complained of the hidings of his Father's face, yet he did not lose the consciousness that God was

[b] Mark xv. 23. compared with ib. 36.
[c] John x. 17, 18. [d] Matt. xxvii. 50. [e] Mark xv. 37, 39.
[f] ἀφῆκε τὸ πνεῦμα. [g] Acts iii. 15.

was his Father: on the contrary, with dignified composure he committed his soul into his Father's hands[h]. Often had he spoken of *going to* his Father, just as a man would have spoken of going to a distant land[i]: and now that his time was come, he meekly "bowed his head," and surrendered up his soul, having discharged his appointed office, and filled up his destined measure, both of active and passive obedience. How beautiful does death appear, when thus disarmed of its sting! O that *we* may be enabled thus to meet this king of terrors, and to welcome his arrival as the best of friends!]

Let this affecting subject be IMPROVED by us,

1. For the confirmation of our faith—

[The wonderful minuteness of prophecy, surveyed as it must be in the accomplishment of the predictions, affords the strongest ground for our faith and hope. St. Peter laid great stress upon it in his addresses to the Jewish people, and urged the consideration of it as an encouragement to them to expect from Christ all the blessings of grace and glory[k]. To you then would we make our appeal: In whom were these things ever verified, if not in Christ? or what room is there for doubt respecting his Messiahship, when he has fulfilled every thing which the Messiah was either to do or suffer? I may add too, What doubt can exist respecting the accomplishment of all the promises to those who truly believe in him? Let us view him thus as "the Foundation which God has laid in Zion;" and let us expect from him whatever his grace has promised, and our necessities require.]

2. For the regulation of our conduct—

[We have seen the Saviour's example; both in life and death: and in conformity to that we should desire both to live and die. Let us not be anxious to depart from life, till we have completed the work which God has given us to do———On the other hand, let us not be afraid of death, but regard it as a departure to our Father's house. The words of David seem to have been referred to by our Lord on this occasion, and they are admirably suited to the case of a dying Believer[l]: and to one who can use them in faith, death is nothing more than falling asleep in the bosom of our Lord[m]———]

[h] Luke xxiii. 46.
[i] John xvi. 16, 28. & xvii. 11, 13.
[k] Acts iii. 18, 19.
[l] Ps. xxxi. 5.
[m] Acts vii. 59, 60.

DCCCXLV.

CHRIST'S WORK FINISHED.

John xix. 30. *It is finished.*

THESE, with the exception of the words with which our blessed Lord commended his spirit into his Father's hands, were the last words which he spake, previous to his dissolution. In the original, they are comprehended in one word[a]: and since the foundation of the world there never was a single word uttered, in which such diversified and important matter was contained. Every word indeed that proceeded from our Saviour's lips, deserves the most attentive consideration: but this eclipses all. To do justice to it, is beyond the ability of men or angels: its height, and depth, and length, and breadth, are absolutely unsearchable. But that its import may be somewhat more clearly seen, we propose to shew,

I. The truths contained in it—

Our blessed Lord not having expressly stated what he alluded to as finished, we are left to gather his meaning from a general view of that work which he came to accomplish. We understand then, that when he uttered this word, the following things were finished:

1. The fulfilment of prophecy—

[Prophecy was of two kinds, one consisting of typical institutions, the other of positive declarations. Now both these kinds of prophecy received their accomplishment in the death of Christ.

The brazen serpent, the daily sacrifice, the burning of the flesh of the sin-offerings *without the camp*, with various other ordinances, shadowed forth the death of Christ by crucifixion without the walls of Jerusalem; and at that moment, when our Lord was about to resign his spirit, were all fulfilled: for he was then "suffering without the gate[b];" and was "lifted up, that all who believed in him might be healed" of their wounds[c]; and was "the Lamb of God taking away the sin of the world[d]."

The

[a] Τετέλεσται. [b] Heb. xiii. 11, 12. [c] John iii. 14, 15.
[d] John i. 29.

The declarations of the Prophets were so numerous and minute, that a history of our Lord might be compiled from them, fuller, in many respects, than is contained in any one of the Evangelists. The person that betrayed him, the manner in which his trial should be conducted, the sufferings he should undergo previous to the final execution of his sentence, the death to which he should be doomed, the persons in whose company he should suffer, the manner in which his clothes should be disposed of, the very taunts with which he should be insulted in his dying hour, were all fulfilled as exactly, as if the agents in this bloody tragedy had designed to accomplish the predictions concerning him. There remained only one single prophecy to be fulfilled: and who would have conceived that ever *that* should be fulfilled? It was customary for the friends of the persons who were executed to give them "wine mingled with myrrh," in order to blunt the edge of their sufferings: and the friends of our Lord had offered him such a potion; but he would not drink of it, because he would do nothing that should have a tendency to diminish his sufferings[e]: but when, in his last moments, he said, "I thirst," the cruel soldiers, wishing only to mock him, and augment his anguish[f], dipped a spunge in vinegar, and gave him that to drink; and thus fulfilled that prophecy of David, "In my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink[g]." This done, no other prophecy remained to be fulfilled; and therefore our Lord instantly said, "It is finished."]

2. The work of Redemption—

[Two things were undertaken by our Lord, and were to be done by him in order to man's redemption: *the penalties of the law were to be endured* by him, in order that Divine justice might be satisfied for our sins; and *the demands of the law were to be obeyed* by him, in order that sinners, who could have no righteousness of their own, might be made righteous in him. Both these things were now completed. Our blessed Lord had obeyed the law in its fullest extent: not the smallest defect could be found in him: man could find none; Satan could find none; God himself could find none: for "he did always the things that pleased the Father;" and "in him was no sin." By his obedience, the law, which we had violated, was "magnified and made honourable:" and "a righteousness was brought in," a righteousness which shall be unto all and upon all them that believe, and which is amply sufficient for the justification of all who trust in it. Moreover, all was now endured that was necessary to make an atonement for our sins. Did we deserve shame, and condemnation, and misery? did we deserve to have the face of God hid from us, and the vials of

[e] Mark xv. 23. [f] Luke xxiii. 36. [g] Ps. lxix. 21.

of his wrath poured out upon us, and to be consigned over to everlasting death? All this he suffered, as far as was compatible with his nature, and as far as was necessary for the satisfaction of Divine justice. He was not indeed actually dead; but the moment was arrived for his surrendering up his life; and therefore he could properly say, "It is finished."]

3. The salvation of man—

[All that was necessary for man's salvation was now effected. Nothing remained to be done, in order to the perfecting of his work on earth, or to the forming of a perfect ground for man's acceptance with God. It is true, that man must *repent:* but he need not to repent *in order to make satisfaction for his sins:* no repentance of man can add to the value of Christ's sacrifice. Men must repent, in order to justify God in the denunciations of his wrath, and to evince their abhorrence of their past ways, and to bring their souls to a fit state for the enjoyment of God's mercy: but to atone for sin, he needs not to repent: the offering of the body of Jesus Christ upon the cross is a sufficient propitiation for the sins of the whole world. It is true also, that man must obey: but he need not to obey *in order to form for himself a justifying righteousness before God:* he can never add to the perfection of Christ's righteousness; and any attempt to add to it will defeat, instead of furthering, his acceptance through it. Whatever obedience men may render for the honouring of God, and the adorning of their profession, they must renounce it utterly in point of dependance, and must look for salvation solely through the righteousness of Christ[h]. Nothing remains for man but to accept the salvation which Christ has purchased: and if he be enabled in his last hour (like the dying thief) to rely on the blood and righteousness of the Lord Jesus, he shall as assuredly be saved, as if he had repented and obeyed a thousand years. We do not say this to lessen the importance of repentance and obedience; (for in their proper place they are of infinite importance;) but only to explain and vindicate our Lord's assertion in the text.]

The meaning of our Lord's declaration being ascertained, let us bring forth,

II. The truths to be deduced from it—

Selecting such inferences only as are most prominent, we observe,

1. That there is a sure ground of hope for all who feel their need of mercy—

[If

[h] Phil. iii. 9.

[If persons of a desponding frame would state what they could wish God to do for them, in order to remove their fears; we are well persuaded, not only that every thing they can desire has been already done, but that infinitely more has been done for them than they could even ask or think. Would they have an atonement made for their sins, even such an atonement as shall perfectly satisfy Divine justice, and discharge the utmost farthing of their debt? We must say to them, 'It is done;' "It is finished." Would they have a perfect righteousness wrought out for them? Would they be invited and commanded by God himself to clothe themselves with it as a robe, so that not even the piercing eye of God should be able to behold a spot or blemish in them? "It is finished." Would they have the gift of the Holy Spirit purchased for them, so they may be assured of almighty aid in all their difficulties and conflicts? "It is finished." Let them state what they will, (provided it be really calculated to inspire confidence, and suited to the condition of the Church militant,) and we do not hesitate to say respecting it, "It is finished." Why then should any despond, as though their guilt were too great to be forgiven, or their corruptions too strong to be subdued? Let the humble and contrite only reflect on this dying declaration of our Lord, and they can never want encouragement to trust in him.]

2. That they in whom a good work is begun, have reason to hope that it shall be carried on and perfected to the day of Christ—

[The work of bringing sinners to repentance, and of renewing them after the Divine image, is committed to Christ. "He is exalted to be a Prince and a Saviour, to give repentance and remission of sins." In him, according to the Father's appointment, all fulness dwells; and out of his fulness all his people are to receive the grace that shall be needful and sufficient for them. Now if in the arduous work which Christ undertook to do *for* men, he persisted till he could say, "It is finished;" why should he not do the same in the work that he has engaged to accomplish *in* them? If he stop short in this, it must be either from a want of *power*, or a want of *inclination*, to persist in it. But it cannot be from want of *power*; since it is surely an easier thing to preserve life than to give it; and therefore if he have given it, he cannot want power to maintain it. Nor can it be from a want of *inclination*; for, if he had not been carried on by an irresistible inclination to save us, he would not have persisted in his former work; he would have put away the bitter cup from his lips, instead of drinking it, as he did, to the very dregs. If therefore he drew not back in the former case, we may be sure he will not in this case: he will never cease from working effectually in us, till

he

he can say, "It is finished." That this deduction is clear and Scriptural, we have very abundant evidence. The prophet declares, that "He who has laid the foundation of the spiritual temple, will also finish it;" and that he will bring forth the top-stone thereof with shoutings, crying, "Grace, grace, unto it[i]." On this account the Apostle also calls him, "The Author and Finisher of our faith;" and declares himself "*confident* of this very thing, that He who hath begun the good work, will perform it till the day of Christ[k]." Let Believers then "cast their care on Him who careth for them," and know assuredly, that "he will keep the feet of his saints, and "perfect that which concerneth them."]

3. That those who have obtained mercy have the strongest possible incentive to maintain good works—

[We have before stated, that Christ has done every thing that was necessary for man's salvation; and that nothing remains for man to add to the finished work of Christ. But we also noticed, that, though man has nothing to do *for the purpose of meriting salvation, or for laying a foundation of his acceptance with God*, yet in other points of view he has abundant occasion to work; yea, he is commanded to "work out his salvation with fear and trembling." We have no other way of proving the truth of our faith, or the sincerity of our love, than by bringing forth the fruits of righteousness. Shall this then be thought a wearisome task by any of us? Shall we wish to intermit our labours, or to stop short of the highest attainments? Surely not: for if Christ finished the work assigned him, because of his love to us, we can do no less than persist in our work, whereby we are to evidence our love to him. Let us then "go on towards perfection:" let us "forget what is behind, and press forward towards that which is before:" let us "work while our day lasts;" that in the evening of our life we may be able to say with Christ, "Father, I have glorified thee on earth, I have finished the work which thou hast given me to do." Then, while hypocrites and apostates shall take up this expression in reference to their hopes of salvation, and say, "My day of grace is finished, and all possibility of obtaining mercy is finished;" we shall shout in heaven, "It is finished, it is finished!" "fears, temptations, conflicts, are all finished!" "I have fought the good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith;" and nothing now remains to me but an eternity of uninterrupted happiness and glory.]

[i] Zech. iv. 7, 9. [k] Phil. i. 6.

DCCCXLVI.

THE TREATMENT OF OUR LORD'S BODY ON THE CROSS.

John xix. 31—37. *The Jews therefore, because it was the Preparation, that the bodies should not remain upon the cross upon the sabbath-day, (for that sabbath-day was an high day,) besought Pilate that their legs might be broken, and that they might be taken away. Then came the soldiers, and brake the legs of the first, and of the other which was crucified with him. But when they came to Jesus, and saw that he was dead already, they brake not his legs: but one of the soldiers with a spear pierced his side; and forthwith came thereout blood and water. And he that saw it bare record, and his record his true; and he knoweth that he saith true, and that ye might believe. For these things were done, that the Scriptures should be fulfilled, A bone of him shall not be broken. And again another Scripture saith, They shall look on him whom they pierced.*

UNSEARCHABLE is the depravity of the human heart. Who that had not seen it recorded in the holy Scriptures, would conceive it possible, that those who felt no remorse for having crucified the Lord of Glory, should yet pretend to feel such reverence for the sabbath-day, as not to endure the thought of its being profaned by his body remaining on the cross on that day? Horrid hypocrisy! This was indeed to "strain out a gnat, and swallow a camel." What if there were extraordinary reasons for sanctifying that day, as being the *first* day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread [a]; could they be supposed to operate on a mind that was dead to all sense of justice or of mercy? But all was wisely ordered and overruled by God, who by this means wrought more effectually to the establishing of the claims of Jesus to the Messiahship: for from hence arose *their singular treatment of our Lord's body;* which, together with *the instruction*

[a] Lev. xxiii. 5—7. Whitby, and others after him, appear to me to be under a mistake in calling it the *second* day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, and the day for presenting the *sheaf of new corn;* which was to be, not *on* the sabbath-day, but on the morrow *after* it. Ib. ver. 15, 16.

instruction to be gathered from it, will form the subject of our present discourse.

Let us consider,

I. Their singular treatment of our Lord's body—

It was truly singular—

[The Romans were accustomed to leave upon the cross those who were so put to death, in order that they might be devoured by birds of prey. Agreeably therefore to their customs, the bodies of Jesus and of the malefactors should have been kept upon the cross. But the Jews, who on some occasions put persons to death by hanging, were forbidden to keep them on the tree all night[b]: and, as the next day was so great a day, they thought it right to interest themselves with the Governor to adopt on that occasion the Jewish, instead of the Roman, plan; proposing however, that the legs of the crucified persons should be broken, in order to effect and secure their death; thus making up by increased agony what might be equivalent to the longer duration of their misery. Permission is granted; the order given; and in part executed: the legs of both the malefactors were broken; but, our Lord being already dead, the soldiers forbore to execute this order upon him. But one of the soldiers, wantonly and of his own mind, thrust a spear into his side; from whence issued a stream of blood and water; the water flowing from the pericardium, and the blood from the heart itself.

Now this we call *singular:* for it was strange, that an order given in relation to him as well as the other two, should be executed on *them,* and not on *him*; and it was strange also that an unauthorized act of violence should be committed upon *him,* and not on *them:* for, if done to *them,* it would have been an act of mercy; but, as done to *him,* it was only an act of malice, as impotent as it was inhuman.]

But God had wise ends in permitting this—

[There were prophecies yet remaining to be accomplished; and it was necessary that every part of Scripture should be fulfilled. Now it had been ordained respecting the paschal lamb, that "not a bone of it should be broken[c]." This lamb was intended to be a type of Christ; and that peculiar appointment in the type must be verified in the antitype: and, if not verified in him, Christ's claim to the Messiahship must be void. Behold then, how nearly Jesus' title to the Messiahship was destroyed! The proposal of breaking the legs was made, and acceded to, in reference to him as well as to the malefactors who were crucified with him: it was also executed first on one of the malefactors, then on the other.

[b] Deut. xxi. 23. [c] Exod. xii. 46. Numb. xxv. 12.

other. Why does not the man proceed? Why does he presume to disobey the order? Who has told him to exercise his own discretion? Who interferes about the matter, or attempts either to restrain or to dissuade the executioner? Had he but given the intended blow, there had been an end to all Jesus' pretensions to the Messiahship. But an invisible hand restrained him; God himself overruled his mind; and therefore overruled it, that the Scripture might not be broken.

But why does one of the soldiers take upon him to offer an indignity to the body of Jesus, without any commission or order from his superiors? There was another prophecy to be fulfilled, which had said, that the Jews "should look on Him whom they had pierced[d]:" therefore God put it into the heart of his enemies to do to him what they did *not to the others*, and to refrain from doing to *him* what they did *to the others*; to do to *him* what they were *not ordered*, and to refrain from doing what they *were ordered*. If this also had not been done, our Lord's claim to the Messiahship had failed; and equally so, if the spear, instead of piercing between the bones, had struck a rib. But there are no such things as casualties, where God's will is concerned: for though every person is a free agent in what he does, he acts no less certainly, than if God used him as an involuntary machine: "God's counsel shall stand, and he will do all his pleasure[e]." The Scriptures had spoken these things, and it was not possible that "one jot or tittle of them should fail."]

The more minutely we consider this subject, the more important will appear,

II. The instruction to be gathered from it—

Whilst the foregoing circumstances evince the universal agency of God's providence, they are particularly suited to shew us,

1. What grounds we have for hope—

[The preceding circumstances fully establish the Messiahship of Jesus. But here arises a question; 'How do I know that he really died? I know that he was to "pour out his soul unto *death*[f]: but am I sure that he really *died*? I know that just before the time he was supposed to die, he spoke repeatedly with so loud a voice, as clearly to prove that his strength was by no means exhausted: I know that "Pilate himself marvelled at his being reported to be so soon dead:" am I sure then that he was not merely in a swoon? for if that were the case, all that he did and suffered can be of no avail for my salvation. If he did not *die*, he did not atone for sin: if he did not *die*, the story of his resurrection is false; and, as the

[d] Zech. xii. 10. [e] Isai. xlvi. 10. [f] Isai. liii. 12.

the Apostle himself has said, our faith is vain.' But, blessed be God! we are not left to entertain any such doubts: for the officious malice of the soldier who pierced him to the heart, put it beyond a possibility of doubt. Had Jesus been in perfect health, this wound must have killed him instantly: and so publickly was it given, that amidst all the falsehoods invented by the Jews to justify their rejection of him, they never thought of saying that he did not *die*. Behold then, this point is clear: the Messiah was to *die*; and this person, to whom so many testimonies were given, did really *die*; "he became obedient unto *death*, even the death of the cross." The atonement then that was to be made for sin, was really made: the debt due for our iniquities was discharged: and since "He who knew no sin was made a sin-offering for us, we, who have no righteousness, may be made the righteousness of God in him."]

2. What blessings we are to expect—

[The Apostle's solicitude to impress our minds with the things which he beheld, marks unquestionably the importance of them. He declares that his testimony was founded, not on report, but on ocular demonstration; and he demands credit of us upon that ground. But what was it which he so particularly noticed? was it the wound inflicted with the spear? No; it was the issue of water and of blood from the wound. And why was he so particular in the mention of it? it was because there was a deep mystery contained in it, even a typical exhibition of those blessings which we are to receive from him. If we look into the Scriptures, we shall find our justification constantly ascribed to his blood, as cleansing us from sin[g]; and, in like manner, our sanctification as uniformly ascribed to his Spirit[h]." Under the law, these two blessings, together with the mode of their conveyance to our souls, were typified by the blood of the sacrifices, which purged from guilt, and by the various washings, which cleansed from defilement: and they were distinctly promised to the Church by express declarations of God himself[i]. At the introduction of the Christian dispensation, they were mystically represented by the event of which we are speaking, where the blood and water, though flowing in one stream, were distinctly seen. This surprising appearance was designed to shew, that both blessings flow equally from the pierced side of Christ. They flow together, to shew, that we are not to expect the one without the other; and they are kept distinct, to shew, that the blessings are perfectly distinct, and must never be confounded.

We

[g] Rom. v. 9. Eph. i. 7. & ii. 13. Heb. ix. 14. 1 Pet. i. 19. Rev. i. 5.
[h] Rom. viii. 9, 13. 2 Thess. ii. 13. Eph. v. 25—27.
[i] Zech. xiii. 1. Ezek. xxxvi. 25, 26.

We will endeavour, in few words, to render this more clear. Faith and holiness are distinct things, even as blood and water are distinct: faith is necessary to procure for us *a title to* heaven; and holiness is necessary to *make us meet for* heaven: moreover, we must apply to ourselves the blood, in order to obtain the one; and we must also be sprinkled with the water, in order to obtain the other[k]. We must take care also not to mix the two: it is the blood alone that justifies, and the Spirit alone that renews: our justification by faith will not supersede the necessity of holiness; nor will our renovation by the Spirit supersede the necessity of faith in Christ. We must understand the proper offices of each; and must keep each in its proper place: only we must remember, that they *both* flow from the wounded side of Christ; and that Christ is the only fountain from whence either the one or the other can be derived.

It is possible that this interpretation may appear fanciful: but it will no longer be thought so, if only we consult the exposition which St. John himself has given us of this mystery: "This," says he, "is He that came by water and blood, even Jesus Christ; not by water only, but by water and blood[l]:" from whence we may fairly infer, that "what God has so joined together, we must never attempt to put asunder."]

3. What dispositions we are to cultivate—

[The latter prophecy referred to in our text says, "They shall look on Him whom they have pierced:" and the prophet adds, "They shall mourn and be in bitterness, as one mourneth for his only son." Now this shews the two dispositions which we should exercise towards our adorable Lord and Saviour: we should "look to him" with *penitence* and *faith*. Never can we mourn too deeply, when we reflect that it was *our sin* that crucified the Lord of Glory: the Jews and Romans were *the instruments*; but our iniquities were *the cause* of all his sufferings; "He was wounded for *our transgressions*, and bruised for *our iniquities*." Nay more, by our sins we have "crucified the Lord afresh, and put him to an open shame[m]." If then we feel that the Jews have cause to mourn, how should *we* mourn, who have done that with our eyes open, which they did only through the blindness and ignorance of their hearts! Yet, whilst we mourn and are in bitterness, we should not forget that Jesus is the propitiation for our sins, that he "bare them all in his own body on the tree," and that, by becoming a curse for us, he has redeemed us from the curse which our sins had merited. We should resemble the penitent under the law, who, whilst he presented his sacrifice to God and confessed over it his sins, put his hand upon the head of his sacrifice,

[k] Heb. x. 22. [l] 1 John v. 6. [m] Heb. vi. 6.

sacrifice, and transferred his guilt to that as his substitute and surety. Thus should we do: in our view of Christ upon the cross, we should unite penitence and faith: to separate the two will destroy their efficacy altogether: an impenitent faith, and an unbelieving penitence, will leave us in no better state than that of devils, of whom St. James says, that "they believe and tremble[a]." Let us then cultivate these dispositions to our dying hour; and look unto Jesus with penitential faith, and with believing penitence.]

[a] Jam. ii. 19.

DCCCXLVII.

THE BURIAL OF JESUS.

John xix. 38—42. *And after this, Joseph of Arimathea, (being a disciple of Jesus, but secretly for fear of the Jews,) besought Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus: and Pilate gave him leave. He came therefore, and took the body of Jesus. And there came also Nicodemus, (which at the first came to Jesus by night,) and brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about an hundred pound weight. Then took they the body of Jesus, and wound it in linen clothes with the spices, as the manner of the Jews is to bury. Now in the place where he was crucified, there was a garden; and in the garden a new sepulchre, wherein was never man yet laid. There laid they Jesus therefore, because of the Jews' Preparation-day; for the sepulchre was nigh at hand.*

THE smallest circumstances relative to the life and death of our blessed Lord may well be supposed to deserve peculiar attention: but the mere interment of his body one would imagine might be passed over as a matter of no moment. Yet we find our Lord himself repeatedly referring to it, during the course of his ministry. He mentions the indispensable necessity of his interment, in order to complete the purposes of his grace[a]: he specifies the term of his intended continuance in the heart of the earth[b]: and he commends the fervent love of Mary in pouring ointment on his head, as a prophetic, though not an intended, preparation for his burial[c]. In fact, the Inspired History does not record any thing more minutely and circumstantially than the funeral of our Lord:

[a] John xii. 24 [b] Matt. xii. 40. [c] Matt. xxvi. 12.

Lord: and the more carefully we attend to what is spoken respecting it, the more interesting and instructive it will appear. Let us consider then,

I. The peculiar circumstances of his interment—

[In the moment when our Lord seemed abandoned by all, except a few women and his beloved Disciple, and when, as it should appear, no motive could any longer exist for shewing a regard for him, God raised up two persons of eminence and distinction to pay that respect to him when dead, which had been refused to him when living. One of these persons is very particularly described: the different Evangelists being consulted, we learn *his name and place of abode:* he was "Joseph, of Arimathea," or Ramah, in the tribe of Ephraim, the birth-place and residence of Samuel. Next, we have *his rank and condition:* he was "a rich man, and an honourable counsellor," one of the Jewish Sanhedrim. Further, we are informed of *his character and conduct:* he was "a just and good man," who, when the Sanhedrim had condemned our Lord as guilty of death, "had not consented to the counsel and deed of them." Lastly, mention is made of *his principles and attainments:* he was "a disciple of Christ," who even then, when the Apostles had lost all thought that Christ's kingdom should ever be established, actually "waited for the kingdom of God," in expectation that it should yet appear[d]. This person went in "boldly" to Pilate, and begged to have the body of Jesus at his disposal. This conduct of his manifested a considerable degree of fortitude: for it could not but be very offensive to the rest of the Jewish Council to see one of their own body paying funeral honours to one, whom, but a few hours before, they had condemned and crucified as a malefactor: besides, if Jesus should rise again according to the expectations that had been formed, he would infallibly be accused as a confederate with the other disciples, and as having assisted them in stealing away the corpse from the tomb. Pilate, not believing that Jesus was so soon dead, sent for the Centurion who superintended the execution, to inquire respecting it: and, on being assured by him, that he was really dead, and that, subsequent to his death, he had been stabbed to the heart with a spear, he gave his consent. Joseph therefore went and took down the body, and wrapped it in some fine linen which he had bought for the purpose. But in this he was assisted by another person of eminence, Nicodemus by name, "the same man who, three years before, had come to Jesus by night," to inquire into his doctrine; and who on one occasion had befriended him before the Jewish Council,

[d] Compare Matt. xxvii. 57—60. Mark xv. 42—46. & Luke xxiii. 50—53. with the text.

Council, by stating, that the Jewish law did not admit of any person being condemned till after an opportunity of vindicating his own innocence had been afforded him[e]. This man "bought a large quantity of myrrh and aloes, and other spices, about an hundred pounds weight;" and, together with Joseph, wrapped up the dead body in it for the present, intending, probably after the sabbath, to embalm it with greater care.

Joseph, after the custom of the Jews, had provided for himself a new tomb, hewn out of a rock: and, it being near to the place where Jesus was crucified, he deposited the body there; and, for the sake of decency and security, rolled a great stone to the door of the sepulchre.

Such is the account given us of the burial of our Lord: and at first sight perhaps it may appear, if not uninteresting, at least destitute of any important instruction. But we shall not be of this opinion, if we duly weigh, as we propose to do,]

II. The practical benefits resulting from it—

There is not a single circumstance in this account which is not very important; and the whole taken together is of singular use,

1. To establish our faith—

[Two things are necessary to be ascertained, before we can have just grounds for our faith in Christ; namely, first, *the truth of the facts* recorded concerning him; and next, *the agreement of those facts with the prophecies* of the Old Testament. Now the main facts to be ascertained, are, the death and the resurrection of Jesus: for, if he did not die, he has made no atonement for our sins; and, if he did not rise again, we have no evidence that his atonement has been accepted in our behalf. But behold how these facts are contained in the history before us! Pilate had doubts respecting the death of Jesus; and would not consent to Joseph's request, till the point was ascertained from the very person whom he had appointed to superintend the execution. Had there been a spark of life in the body, the enemies of Jesus would not have given it into the possession of his friends; nor would his friends have consigned it to the tomb. His death therefore was proved beyond a doubt; nor was the truth of his resurrection less clearly manifested: for the tomb was new; and we are repeatedly told, that no corpse had ever yet been laid in it. Had there been any other corpse there, the resurrection of Jesus might have been ascribed to that; as the restoration of a dead body to life was effected by its being brought in contact with the bones of

[e] John vii. 50—52.

of the prophet Elisha[f]: or it might have been affirmed, that it was the other corpse, and not that of Jesus, that revived. But, when there never had been any other corpse deposited there, the resurrection of Jesus could not be confounded with that of any other person; nor could it be ascribed to any other power than his own. Moreover, the sepulchre being hewn out of a solid rock, was inaccessible, except at that entrance which was stopped by the stone, and guarded by the band of soldiers: had it been accessible in any other way, there might have been some plausibility in the story that the corpse was stolen from it by the Disciples; but the very nature of the grave precluded a possibility of removing the body from it, without the knowledge of the Roman guard.

Thus far then *the facts* are clear: and now mark *their correspondence with the voice of prophecy.* It had been expressly foretold, that, though Christ should be "numbered with transgressors," and have "his grave appointed with the wicked; yet *with the rich should be his tomb*[g]." This was as improbable as any event that could be conceived: the order was the same in relation to him as to the other malefactors, that his bones should be broken, and that he should be dealt with precisely in the way that the others were: yet behold, at the very instant when this prophecy appeared to have failed, God put it into the heart of "a *rich* man," already provided with a tomb, near to the very place, to ask permission to inter the body, and actually to inter it in his own tomb! Surely, if the minute accomplishment of prophecy in the person of the Lord Jesus were duly considered, it would not be possible for any human Being, whether Jew or Gentile, to entertain a doubt respecting the truth of his Messiahship: yet is this but one point of an hundred whereon our faith rests, and whereby it may be established.]

2. To confirm our hope—

[Many are the prophecies relating to the Church at large, and the promises relating to every individual Believer, which yet remain to be accomplished, and for the accomplishment of which no visible means exist. Look at the state of the world, and see, how impracticable, humanly speaking, the idea is, of forming the whole race of mankind into one great society, who shall all acknowledge the Lord Jesus as their Supreme Head, and trust in him as their only Saviour, and serve him with their whole hearts, and enjoy and glorify him with their whole souls. Or look at any individual Believer, and see his manifold corruptions, his innumerable temptations, his potent enemies: how can we conceive that he shall ever attain the Divine image, and triumph over all the powers of earth and hell? Yet we may see in the history before

[f] 2 Kin. xiii. 21. [g] See Isai. liii. 9. Bp. Lowth's translation.

before us, that God will never want means to effect his gracious purposes. He that raised up a Moses in the very court of Pharaoh, to deliver his people from Egyptian bondage; and foretold Cyrus even by name, three hundred years before he was born, as the destined Restorer of his people from their captivity in Babylon; and raised up Esther, in so astonishing a way, in the house of Ahasuerus, to save the whole Jewish nation from destruction; may safely be trusted to accomplish his own purposes in his own time and way. We have no occasion to inquire, *How* shall he do this or that? it is quite sufficient that he has promised: and it is our privilege to know, that "what he has promised he is able also to perform;" and that of all the good things which he has authorized us to expect, "not one shall ever fail[h]"———]

3. To enlarge our charity—

[We are too apt to judge of things according as they appear to us, without considering how limited our views are, and how incompetent we are to judge aright. If we see not many who openly acknowledge God, we are ready to think the number of his worshippers much fewer than they really are. The prophet Elijah erred in this respect: he thought that he stood alone in Israel, and that all besides himself were idolaters; whereas God informed him that there were no less than seven thousand men in Israel who had not bowed their knee to the image of Baal. And we, if we had lived at the time of our Lord's crucifixion, should have concluded, that amongst the great Council of the Jewish nation, who condemned him to death, there was not one who was not a decided enemy of the Lord Jesus. But the history shews, that there were two persons of great eminence amongst them, who were truly pious, though they had been restrained by fear from making a public profession of their sentiments. We must not be understood as intending to justify or excuse the fear of man; for it is certainly a great and heinous sin; and the man who is ashamed of Christ, and denies Christ now, has reason to fear that Christ will be ashamed of him, and deny him at the last day: but still it is comfortable to think that God has many "hidden ones" even amongst his most inveterate enemies, and many who will perhaps come forth at a future period with more "boldness," and to more effect, than others who have made an open profession of his truth. I say again, We mean not to extenuate the guilt of cowardice; but still it is a fact, that many persons, whose cowardice we deplore, have opportunities of rendering services to God which they could never have rendered, if their profession of religion had been more avowed: and therefore, whilst we lament

[h] See Josh. xxiii. 14.

lament the weakness of the religious principle within them, we must neither judge them too severely, nor undervalue their real worth. We must make just allowance for those who are in high official stations, whose difficulties are thereby greatly increased. We must not despise the day of small things; but must rather bear with the infirmities of the weak; and rejoice in the hope, that they who are yet but "babes in Christ," will, in God's time, become men, and warriors, and "valiant for the truth." Many, like Paul, are training in the ranks of Christ's enemies, who shall one day come forth as champions to fight and conquer in his cause.]

4. To reconcile us to the thoughts of death—

[Death is universally regarded as "the king of terrors." Our nature revolts at the idea of being committed to the tomb. But why should we shudder at it, when we see the Lord of life and glory going down into the heart of the earth? Surely he has perfumed and sanctified the grave; and we may well be satisfied to be conformed to him in his death, when we have the blessed prospect of resembling him also in his resurrection. He indeed "saw no corruption" there; whereas we shall be devoured by worms, and return to our native dust: but then this will be only for a time; for we shall surely at the last day be raised again, and "that which was sown in weakness, dishonour, and corruption, shall be raised in incorruption, power, and glory:" yes, "this mortal body shall be fashioned like unto Christ's glorious body," and, together with our souls, be made partaker of everlasting felicity. All that we have to be concerned about, is, to be ready for the change; to seek an interest in that adorable Saviour who died for us, and to get an experimental "knowledge of him in the power of his resurrection," that, "being rendered conformable to his death, we may by any means attain the resurrection of the dead[i]."

We condemn not the respect shewn to departed friends, when we consign them to the grave. The pomp and splendor indeed of some funerals are an insult, rather than an honour, to the putrifying remains of one who is paying the penalty of sin: but a modest respect is due to that, which lately was a temple of the living God, and which shall ere long be restored, in perfect purity, to the full enjoyment of his presence. Yet we need not be solicitous about this: let us only be anxious, whether for ourselves or others, to "fall asleep in Jesus;" and then, whether honoured or not in our funeral rites, we shall be raised, through him, to endless felicity and glory.]

[i] Phil. iii. 10, 11.

DCCCXLVIII.

THE RESURRECTION OF CHRIST.

John xx. 8, 9. *Then went in also that other Disciple, which came first to the sepulchre; and he saw, and believed. For as yet they knew not the Scripture, that he must rise again from the dead.*

ON this day was fulfilled that prophecy, which is so often quoted in the New Testament, "The stone which the builders disallowed, the same is made the head of the corner." Yes, "this is the day which the Lord has made; we will rejoice and be glad in it[a]." It is true, the arrival of it in the first instance afforded no satisfaction either to the friends or enemies of our Lord. The earthquake that attended his resurrection filled the soldiers with consternation and dismay; insomuch that, when they saw "the angel who rolled away the stone from his sepulchre, they shook, and became as dead men:" and all the heads of the Jewish nation, when they saw how ineffectual their precautions had been, were mad with disappointment. The Disciples too were overwhelmed with grief: they had been taught to expect the resurrection of their Lord; yet they seemed to have really less expectation of it than his very enemies; so wholly were they absorbed in grief, and given up to despondency. At last, however, their sorrow was turned into joy; and they were constrained to believe, when they found it no longer possible to doubt.

We will endeavour to shew,

I. The reason of their unbelief—

Our text informs us, that "they knew not the Scripture"—

[Our Lord had often told them, that "he must be killed, and on the third day rise again." He had spoken of it figuratively[b]; he had declared it plainly[c]; he had laid the whole stress of his religion upon it[d]: and his very enemies considered that on this point depended either the proof of his Messiahship, or a decisive evidence of his imposture[e]. But his Disciples

[a] Ps. cxviii. 22—2 [b] John ii. 19, 21. [c] Matt. xx. 19.
[d] Matt. xii. 39, 40. [e] Matt. xxvii. 63, 64.

Disciples never understood him[f]: one of them had even presumed "to rebuke him," as though to talk of his death and resurrection was the result of needless fear or gloomy superstition[g]. Thus, for want of considering what the holy Scriptures, and their Lord, had spoken on this subject, they could not conceive that such an event as his resurrection should ever take place.]

To the same source must be traced the unbelief that generally prevails—

[The Scriptures speak plainly respecting our undone state by nature, and our recovery through Christ alone———— But when we declare these things to men, they are ready to reply, "Doth he not speak parables[h]?———" They know not the Scripture;" they do not understand it; they do not regard it; they form their own opinions without any reference to it; and therefore they neither will nor can receive its decisions———]

But as their unbelief was at last vanquished, we proceed to inquire into,

II. The means by which it was overcome—

The Apostles diligently investigated the subject proposed to them—

[They were informed by Mary Magdalen, that the body of our Lord was removed from the sepulchre. Without loss of time they set out, as expeditiously as possible, to investigate the point. John being the younger man, and not, like Peter, oppressed with a load of guilt, arrived first at the place, and *looked* into the sepulchre: but Peter, being the more intrepid character, as soon as he arrived, *went* directly, and without hesitation, *into* the sepulchre, and saw the careful manner in which the linen and the napkin were folded up and laid in separate places, evidently shewing that the body had not been taken away, nor had escaped but with the utmost calmness and composure. John, emboldened by his example, used the same means of ascertaining the fact; and, on discovering it, "believed" that Christ was indeed risen; whilst Peter, though "wondering at the things that had come to pass," still retained some doubts respecting them. Still, however, the measure of conviction which was wrought in both their minds, was produced by the same means: but it was strongest on him, whose mind was most under the influence of love.]

In a similar way must all unbelief be vanquished—

[We

[f] Mark ix. 9, 10, 31, 32.
[g] Matt. xvi. 21, 22.
[h] Ezek. xx. 49.

[We must search and examine for ourselves: we must also vie with each other, as it were, in the pursuit of truth, animating and encouraging one another both by *testimony* and *example*———To such diligent and candid exertions is the faith of the Beræans ascribed[i]: and wherever they are used, with prayer to God for the illumination of his Spirit, they will sooner or later assuredly succeed———]

From the circumstance of their not yielding an easy assent to what was told them, we shall be led to notice,

III. The grounds which are hereby afforded for our faith—

The Apostles were very slow to believe the fact of Christ's resurrection—

[They would not believe the woman that had seen a vision[k]: nor even when Mary had had a personal interview with him, would they believe[l]; nor even when two of their own body had conversed with him[m]. They would scarcely believe the evidence of their own senses[n]. Nor, when all the others had been overpowered with the weight of evidence, would Thomas yield assent, till, by feeling the very wounds which had been made in the hands and side of Christ, he had a testimony which he could no longer doubt[o].]

But all this tends exceedingly to confirm our faith—

[Had the Disciples yielded an easy assent, their report had been the less worthy of credit: but when they were so incredulous, as to bring on themselves a severe rebuke from Christ for "their unbelief and hardness of heart[p]," their testimony may be relied upon; because they asserted nothing which they had not ascertained to be true by evidence the most solid and incontrovertible. In *this view* their word may be implicitly received: but when, *in addition to all this*, their testimony was confirmed by the visible descent of the Holy Ghost, and by miracles without number, and, lastly, by their willingness at all times to seal it with their blood, there can be no room to entertain a doubt respecting it; nor can any testimony whatever be worthy of the smallest credit, if theirs be not considered as beyond the reach of doubt.]

Assuming then the doctrine of Christ's resurrection as proved, let us contemplate,

1. The benefits dependent on it—

[Every

[i] Acts xvii. 11,12. [k] Luke xxiv. 4—11. [l] Mark xvi. 9—11.
[m] Mark xvi. 12,13. [n] Luke xxiv. 36—41. [o] John xx. 24—27.
[p] Mark xvi. 14.

[Every part of our salvation depends on this, even more than on his death itself[q]———O learn to see this, as the Apostles, when fully instructed, saw it! and rejoice in seeing every thing secured to you both for time and eternity[r]———]

2. The duties arising from it—

[Your great duty is, to be conformed to his resurrection; dying *to* sin, as he died for it, and living *to* God, even as he does——— All the affections of your soul must follow him[s]; and the renovation of your life correspond in all things with the pattern which his resurrection exhibits to your view——— Remember however to look to him for strength; for "without him you can do nothing," but "through his strength you can do all things"———]

[q] Rom. viii. 34. "*rather.*" & Rom. iv. 25. & v. 10.
[r] Col. iii. 3, 4. [s] ib. v. 1, 2.

DCCCXLIX.

THOMAS'S UNBELIEF REPROVED.

John xx. 27, 28. *Then saith he to Thomas, Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side; and be not faithless, but believing. And Thomas answered and said unto him, My Lord, and my God.*

IT is worthy of observation, that the Inspired Writers shew no solicitude to conceal their own faults, or the faults of each other; but that they relate every thing with artless simplicity, precisely as it occurred. The Disciples were all, without exception, reproved as "fools, and slow of heart to believe what had been written by the Prophets" of old. But Thomas in particular gave way to unbelief, and would not credit the resurrection of his Lord, even after all the others were convinced of it. This, however, was overruled by his divine Master, for the good of the Church in all ages: for, whilst it was an occasion of a particular manifestation of Christ to him, it brought forth from him as glorious a confession of Christ, as any we find in the Inspired Volume.

From that manifestation, and that confession, we shall be led to shew,

I. The

I. The evidence we have of the truth of Christianity—

Of course we cannot enter now into the consideration of the evidences at large: we must confine our attention to the two which are mentioned in the passage before us;

1. The testimony of the Apostles in general—

[They had no expectation that their Lord and Master would rise again: and when they were informed that he was risen, they knew not how to believe it. However, the numerous proofs which they had of it on the very day on which he rose, and particularly his presence with them all on the close of that day, convinced them fully that he was indeed risen, and that the same body which had been crucified was restored to life[a]. From that time they entertained no doubt respecting this fundamental article of their faith. On the contrary, as soon as ever the Holy Ghost had descended on them on the day of Pentecost, they spake of it with great boldness, and urged it as a decisive proof that Jesus was the true Messiah. In this testimony they all concurred; nor could the most cruel menaces or persecutions at all abate their confidence in maintaining it. Having themselves had such abundant opportunities of ascertaining the truth of his resurrection during the forty days that he continued upon earth, they were ready to seal their testimony with their own blood, and did actually lay down their lives in confirmation of it. To this conduct they had no temptation whatever; for they knew that nothing but trials and persecutions, imprisonments and death, would be their portion in this world. With what confidence they themselves relied upon this truth, may be seen from their writings[b]: and, if we receive not their testimony, there must be an end of all testimony whatever; since nothing ever was, or can be, so incontrovertibly established, as this fact.]

2. The testimony of Thomas in particular—

[His doubts might seem to justify a suspicion of the veracity, or at least of the judgment, of all the other Apostles: but it rather adds weight to their testimony; since it shews his absolute determination never to acknowledge that fact to have taken place, till it should be proved to him by such evidence as it would be impossible to withstand. Indeed the proof which he required was most unreasonable; for, if our Lord was to submit his wounds to be inspected by all mankind,

[a] Luke xxiv. 39, 40.
[b] Acts i. 3. & x. 41. 1 Cor. xv. 3—8. 1 John i. 1—3.

kind, in order to gain their assent to the truth of his resurrection, he must never go up to heaven at all, but continue on earth to the very end of the world, in order that every person in every successive generation might have the evidence here required. For, if Thomas could not credit the other Apostles who had touched and handled their Lord's body, why should he expect others to credit *him*? And why should not every one to the end of time demand for himself the same evidence that *he* did? But our Lord was pleased to gratify his unreasonable desire; and by thus extorting from him an acknowledgment of his resurrection, he has given to the world such a proof of it as incredulity itself can now no longer withstand.]

Thomas, overcome by this evidence, shews in his acknowledgment,

II. The faith it should produce in us—

It is not an assent to the mere fact of Christ's resurrection that is required of us, but,

1. An assent to all those truths which the resurrection of Christ was intended to confirm—

[Our Lord referred men to his resurrection as the proof of his Messiahship, and as the evidence that the religion which he established was of God. Accordingly, we must consider every word of Christ as confirmed beyond all doubt, the very moment we acknowledge the truth of his resurrection. *The Divinity of his person*, as "Emmanuel, God with us;" *the nature of his death*, as "a propitiation for the sins of the whole world;" *the certainty of acceptance to all that should believe in him*; together with the *whole plan of the Gospel salvation*; must be regarded as inseparably connected with that event, and infallibly established by it ———]

2. A cordial approbation of them—

[To suppose that the words of Thomas were a mere exclamation, only shews to what miserable shifts Socinians are reduced, in order to maintain their views of Christianity. For, not to mention that such an horrible profanation of God's holy name could not be supposed to issue from an Apostle, in the very presence of his Lord, under such peculiar circumstances, we are expressly told that Thomas *addressed those words to our Lord himself*; and consequently they can be interpreted in no other way than an acknowledgment of Christ as "his Lord and his God." And here we may observe, that Thomas does not merely acknowledge Christ from the conviction of his mind, in the same way as the worshippers of Baal acknowledged the supremacy of Jehovah, "The Lord,

He is *the* God; the Lord, He is *the* God[c];[n] but with most affectionate endearment claims him as *his* Lord, and *his* God. Thus must we do: we must receive him as *our* God and Saviour, determining to rely on him alone, to confess him before the whole world, to consecrate to him all our powers both of body and soul, and to glory in him as "all our salvation and all our desire." The language of our hearts must be, "Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire besides thee[d]."]

From a more particular view of this narrative, we may LEARN,

1. The evil of unbelief—

[Infidels pretend that their doubts arise from a want of evidence: but they in reality arise from an indisposition of heart to weigh with candour the evidence before them. This was the fault which Thomas now committed. He did not dispassionately consider the testimony of the other Apostles, but determinately set himself against it; and would admit of no proof, except such as he himself should presume to dictate. And justly might he have been left for ever to perish in his unbelief, because he would not receive a testimony that was decisive of the point. It is precisely thus also with nominal Christians, who, while they admit the truth of Christianity in general, deny every truth that presses on their consciences, and will receive nothing that does not accord with their own pre-conceived notions. But, as they who came out of Egypt, as the Lord's people, perished in the wilderness through their unbelief, so will these never enter into the heavenly Canaan, unless they receive, and act upon, the whole "truth as it is in Christ Jesus." There is quite evidence enough to satisfy the humble inquirer: there is no real ground for doubt, either respecting the way of salvation through a crucified Redeemer, or respecting that holiness of heart and life which he requires: and if men will not "receive the truth in the love of it," they must expect that "God will give them up to believe a lie," to the everlasting ruin of their souls[e].]

2. The folly of neglecting ordinances—

[Thomas was not with the other Apostles on the evening when our Lord first appeared to them; if he had, there is reason to suppose that he would have been satisfied of the truth of Christ's resurrection, as well as they. But, through his absence, he lost that opportunity of beholding his risen Lord; and thus continued in a state of anxious suspense for a whole week,

[c] 1 Kin. xviii. 39. [n] Cant v. 16. Ps. lxxiii. 25.
[d] 2 Thess. ii. 11, 12.

week, after the rest were "filled with joy and peace in believing." As we know not the reason of his absence, we do not condemn him for it: but his loss was the same, by whatever it might be occasioned. And have not many of us suffered loss through our absence from the House of God, or the neglect of private ordinances? It is highly probable that the doubts and fears of many are be traced to this source: they live without the light of God's countenance, because they are not careful "to *walk* with God:" they neglect him; and then he hides himself from them[f]: we can scarcely doubt but that all of us might have enjoyed far richer manifestations of the Saviour's love, if we had been more diligent and watchful in our performance of religious duties. "Let us not then forsake the assembling of ourselves together, (as the manner of some is:)" or intermit our exertions in our secret chamber: but, if we should even wait without a blessing as long as the cripple waited at Bethesda's pool, let us at least secure this consolation, that we have not lost it through our own neglect; and expect assuredly, that, if we are "stedfast and immoveable in waiting upon God, our labour shall not be in vain in the Lord."]

3. The wonderful condescension of the Lord Jesus—

[Notwithstanding the obstinate unbelief of Thomas, our Lord did not cast him off, but even appeared a second time to his Disciples, *on purpose to grant him* the evidence he desired. What amazing condescension was this! Yet it is precisely such as all of us experience at his hands. "He is not extreme to mark what is done amiss" by any of us: He bears with our infirmities, "not breaking the bruised reed nor quenching the smoking flax, but bringing forth judgment unto truth." We, alas! are too often unreasonably dictating to him, when we should rather be meekly submitting to his providence and grace: we refuse to rest upon his promises, unless they be applied to us in such a particular way, or we be enabled to find in ourselves some particular warrant for our faith. But we should take his promises simply as they are given; and expect the accomplishment of them, not because we are worthy, but "because He is faithful who has promised." We do not mean that we are to expect him to save us whilst we are living in sin; for he has not anywhere promised any such thing: but we would have all to "walk by faith, and not by sight;" for it is still as true as ever, that "blessed are they that have not seen and yet have believed."]

[f] 2 Chron. xv. 2.

DCCCL.

INQUIRIES ABOUT LOVE TO CHRIST.

John xxi. 17. *He saith unto him the third time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? Peter was grieved, because he said unto him the third time, Lovest thou me? And he said unto him, Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee.*

IT requires much wisdom to discharge the office of a reprover aright. We have a duty to the Church, not to countenance sin in any one, and least of all in a person professing godliness: on the other hand, we have a duty to our offending brother, not to wound his feelings by needless severity. If his fault have been private, a private admonition will suffice; but if his sin have given open offence, we must bear a public testimony against him, and require a public acknowledgment of his fault. Our blessed Lord was full of compassion towards Peter, after his shameful dereliction of duty: he looked upon him with pity; he appeared to him before any other of his Apostles; and restored him publickly to his office, from which he had fallen. But in what manner did he restore him? He drew forth from him, in the presence of all the Apostles, repeated confessions of his faith and love; and re-invested him with his Apostolic commission, precisely as often as Peter had publickly renounced it.

The questions put to Peter on this occasion, and the answers he gave to them, will naturally furnish us with the following remarks:

I. That repeated violations of duty are a just ground for questioning our love to Christ—

There is no surer test of our love to Christ, than our obedience to his commands—

[This is what our blessed Lord himself requires as the fruit and evidence of our love; "If ye love me, keep my commandments[a]." And certainly a more unexceptionable test cannot be conceived. Had he required only some particular feelings, a person of a sanguine disposition might easily have wrought up himself to those frames which he supposed to

[a] John xiv. 15.

to be indications of love to Christ: and many, on the contrary, might have been discouraged, under the idea that they never had experienced what was necessary to their salvation. But the evidence of an obedient life is such as no man can have who does not love the Lord[b], and as every man will have who does love the Lord[c]: so that it is less likely to be mistaken than any other, and carries stronger conviction with it: it enables us to determine with certainty, who does love him, and who does not[d]. St. John, who was, beyond all others, the loving, and beloved Disciple, not only establishes this as the most unequivocal test of our love[e], but without hesitation pronounces him "a liar," who pretends to have any knowledge of the Saviour, without justifying his pretensions by this mark[f]. We may therefore assume this as an infallible distinction between those who are sincere followers of Christ, and those who are only hypocrites and dissemblers with God.]

In proportion as this evidence is wanting, doubts must be entertained of our love to Christ—

[We speak not now of a course of open sin, which would at once brand us as enemies of Christ: nor, on the other hand, do we speak of those infirmities which are found in the best of men: we refer rather to those habitual deviations from duty which afford us just reason to doubt of our state. We know that, amongst men, there is always a desire to please those whom we love. The "loving one another in word and in tongue is contrasted with the loving in deed and in truth[g]." And supposing the fact to be true, that was an unanswerable question which Delilah put to Sampson; "How canst thou say 'I love thee,' when thy heart is not with me[h]?" If then our heart be not with Christ, if we seek not after him in earnest prayer, if we feel no desire to do his will, if we live in a way which is displeasing to him, if we indulge dispositions and habits which are directly opposite to those which he himself cultivated, how can we imagine that we love him? Such a life is rather characteristic of his enemies than of his friends: and, while we live in such a state, we have far greater reason to suspect our love to him, than to indulge any confidence respecting it.]

We wonder not that "Peter was grieved" at being a third time questioned about the sincerity of his love: for we cannot but feel,

II. That

[b] John xiv. 24. [c] ib. ver. 23.
[d] ib. ver. 21. with 2 Cor. viii. 8. [e] 1 John v. 3. & 2 John 6.
[f] 1 John ii. 3, 4. [g] 1 John iii. 18. [h] Judg. xvi. 15.

II. That the very existence of a doubt respecting it ought to fill us with deep concern—

Let it only be considered, what such a doubt implies: it involves a doubt,

1. Respecting our interest in God's favour—

[There is no medium between a state of favour and acceptance with God, and of obnoxiousness to his wrath and indignation. We must either be his friends or his enemies: we must either be his children, or "the children of the wicked one." Now our blessed Lord has said, "If God were your father, ye would love me[1]:" and consequently, if there be room for questioning our love to him, there is room also for questioning our relation to God. And is it not an awful thing to doubt, whether we be children of God, or children of the devil? Is it a light matter, to whom we belong? Should any man feel composed or satisfied, till he has ascertained this point on sure and Scriptural grounds?

2. Respecting our prospects in the eternal world—

[There are two states, in one or other of which all will be placed as soon as they go hence: to some will be assigned a state of happiness in heaven; to others a state of misery in hell: and whichever be our lot, it will be eternal.

Now that heaven cannot be the receptacle of those who love not the Lord Jesus, is evident: for, what should they do there? or how could they be happy, if they were there? We are not happy even here amongst those whom we do not love; notwithstanding we may manage to conceal our aversion, and to put on a cheerful countenance before them: but in heaven there can be no concealment: our real dispositions will all be manifest; and if we cannot cordially unite in the exercises of those around us, we shall find nothing to amuse or divert our minds: in other words, if our whole delight be not in singing "praises to God and to the Lamb," we shall find no congeniality of sentiment with those around us, nor any occupation suited to our taste: and the very consciousness of our unfitness for the place, will render the place dreary, the company odious, the employment irksome.

And must it not be inexpressibly painful to be left in suspense; to see time running away, and eternity fast approaching, and not to know whether we shall spend that eternity in heaven or in hell? If we were not ourselves melancholy examples of the same obduracy, we should wonder how any one could give sleep to his eyes, or slumber to his eye-lids, till he had attained some solution of this doubt. Were he only in suspense about the issue of a trial for life and death, it would

[1] John viii. 42.

would create considerable anxiety: how much more then should it, when it respects everlasting happiness or everlasting misery! Well indeed may that man be grieved, who is in the least doubt what answer he shall give to the question in our text, "Lovest thou me?"]

We cannot however but take occasion from the instance before us to observe,

III. That notwithstanding we have deviated for a time from the path of duty, we may be so far recovered as to warrant an appeal to Christ, that we do indeed love him—

God forbid that we should encourage any man to think lightly of sin; or that any thing we speak for the comfort of true penitents should have such a construction put upon it. Yet we must not conceal the truth, for fear it should be perverted; nor must we forbear to magnify the grace of God, lest some one should abuse it. Our position, properly understood, will not sanction false confidence in any man. We concede, that a man may have fallen as grossly as ever Peter did, yet may he afterwards recover his confidence towards God, provided, like Peter, he,

1. Bitterly bewail his sin—

[Peter, after his fall, "went out and wept bitterly:" and, as our Lord had particularly "prayed for him, that his faith might not fail," we can have no doubt but that he sought for mercy in God's appointed way. Now let this be done in sincerity and truth, and we do not hesitate to declare, that it shall not be done in vain: whether the guilt be contracted by an ignorant opposer of the Gospel, or a backslidden professor of it, and whether it be more or less heinous, it shall certainly be forgiven[k], and peace shall be again restored to his wounded conscience. "God will heal his backslidings, and love him freely," yea, and seal a sense of his pardoning love upon his soul. Upon his confessing with David, "I have sinned against the Lord," the Lord will say to him, "I have put away thy sin; thou shalt not die."]

2. Take occasion from his fall to search out and mortify his besetting sin—

[Peter's besetting sins were self-preference, and self-confidence. He had such an over-weening conceit of his own

[k] Isai. i. 18. 1 John i. 7, 9.

own strength, that he engaged, that "though all the other Apostles should forsake their Lord, he never would: no; he would rather die with him than deny him." To this our Lord alludes in his first question, "Lovest thou me *more than these?*" To that part of the question Peter made no reply: he would no more boast of his superiority to others; but was contented with affirming what from his inmost soul he knew to be true. Moreover, he seems many years afterwards to have had in view his own fatal miscarriage, when he gave that advice to the Church at large; "Be sober, be vigilant; for your adversary the devil goeth about as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour: whom resist, stedfast in the faith." Thus he learned both humility and caution from his past experience.

A similar effect in us will warrant a similar assurance of our love to Christ. It is often a long time before our besetting sin be even known to us: for sin has such a bewitching power, that it makes us not unfrequently admire as a virtue, what others see and know to be a weakness and a crime. Pride, envy, covetousness, and a variety of other evils, often lurk and reign in us, while we are scarcely sensible of their existence in our hearts. Now if we have been led to search out these hidden abominations, to mourn over them, to subdue and mortify them, and maintain a spirit directly opposed to them, we can scarcely wish for a clearer evidence of our sincerity: the very fruit we produce, indisputably proves our union with Christ; and consequently justifies any assured conviction of our love to him.]

3. Be determined, through grace, to live and die for Christ—

[If sin be unrepented of, or self-confidence be indulged, our resolutions, like Peter's, may prove fallacious: but if formed with a humble dependence upon Divine grace, and with a penitent sense of our former miscarriages, they afford a strong additional testimony on our behalf. Peter speedily evinced the renovation of his soul, when with undaunted courage he charged home upon all the Jewish Sanhedrim the murder of his Lord, and set at nought all their threatenings against him. And if *we* also are enabled boldly to confess Christ, and cheerfully to suffer for him, and unreservedly to devote ourselves unto him, the matter is clear; we do indeed love him; and we may appeal to the heart-searching God that we "love him in sincerity" and truth.]

Let us now institute the INQUIRY, and address to every one of you the question in the text. Let each one put his own name in the place of Peter's,

Peter's, and conceive the Lord Jesus Christ saying to him, Lovest *thou* me? Perhaps all of you, except a few humble and contrite souls, will be ready to answer this question in the affirmative: but if you would enter more dispassionately into it, some of you might possibly apply to yourselves what was spoken to the unbelieving Jews, "I know you, that ye have not the love of God in you[l]:" others of you might be in doubt what answer to make; while others might be able to adopt the language of Peter, "Lord thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee."

Taking for granted that there are these three descriptions of persons here present, we shall ADDRESS ourselves,

1. To those who are convinced that they do not love Christ—

[How surprising is it that there should be such persons in the world! yet this is the state of the generality even of those who live in this Christian land. And what shall I say to them? Are you not yourselves amazed at your own wickedness? Do you not appear to yourselves to be even monsters in impiety? Not to love Him, who is infinitely lovely! Not to love Him, who is so beloved of God, and of the holy angels, and of all the saints both in heaven and earth! Not to love Him, who has so loved you as to give himself for you, and to lay down his own life a ransom for your souls! How astonishing is it that his wrath has not long since broken forth against you to the uttermost to consume you! Do you not tremble lest the curse of God should come upon you[m]? O rest not in a state of such dreadful guilt and danger: but contemplate him; and turn unto him; and make Him "the only-beloved of your souls."]

2. To those who are in doubt whether they love him or not—

[Do not leave this matter any longer in suspense. Search your own hearts, and beg of God to search and try you. Indulge not a needless scrupulosity on the one hand, neither "speak peace unto your souls lightly" on the other hand. Of the two, it were better to be distressed by raising the standard too high, than to deceive yourselves by putting it too low; because, in the one case, your pain will be only small

[l] John v. 42. [m] 1 Cor. xvi. 22.

small and transient; whereas, in the other, it will be unspeakable and eternal. Not that it is at all needful to err on either side: the marks and evidences of true love to Christ are laid down with the utmost precision in the holy Scriptures; and if you read the Scriptures with earnest prayer to God for the illumination of his Spirit, "he will guide you into all truth." If you are destitute of true love, he will convince you of sin; and if you are possessed of it, he will shine upon his own work, and give you the witness of his Spirit that you are his. Your Lord and Judge "*knoweth all things:*" him therefore you cannot deceive: O pray that you may not deceive yourselves.]

3. To those who can truly say, "Lord, I do indeed love thee"—

[How sweet to you must be those words of our Lord, "If any man love me, my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him[n]." You may rest assured, that these words shall be fulfilled to you. There is not any mercy which God will not vouchsafe to those who make Christ their ALL IN ALL. While you have a Scriptural evidence that you do this, you have a right to rejoice: and your joy is an earnest of that everlasting blessedness which you shall possess in his immediate presence.

Be careful then to "abide in his love." Guard against every thing that may impeach the sincerity of your regard. "Keep yourselves diligently in his love;" and be attentive to the duties of your calling, whatever they may be. To Peter, who was a Minister of his Gospel, our Lord said, "Feed my sheep; feed my lambs; feed my sheep." This he required of him as the best testimony of his regard. To you he says, "Finish the work which God hath given thee to do." Can you instruct others, whether adults or children? embrace every opportunity with joy. Can you do any thing whereby your Lord may be glorified? do it; and whatever your hand findeth to do, do it with your might."]

[n] John xiv. 23.

*** ANOTHER EXORDIUM.—It is universally acknowledged, that men ought to inquire into their actions, so far at least as to ascertain that they are just and honourable: but few are aware of the obligation which they lie under, to examine the dispositions of their minds towards God. Yet this is of prime importance. We should ask ourselves frequently, Do I love God? Do I love the Lord Jesus Christ, my Saviour? This was the question which our Lord himself put to Peter after his fall. The question and the answer given to it, furnish us with a fit occasion to observe,—

DCCCLI.

OUT-POURING OF THE SPIRIT.

Acts ii. 1—4. *And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them: and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.*

IT was not long after the Flood that man retained the knowledge of the true God. No sooner did the posterity of Noah begin to multiply upon earth, than they conceived an idea of counteracting the intentions of their Maker in relation to their dispersion over the world, and actually began to build a city sufficiently large for their accommodation, and a tower which might place them out of the reach of any future deluge. When they had made considerable progress in the work, God was pleased to inflict upon them a judgment, which instantly put a stop to the building, and compelled them to separate themselves to different and distant places. They had hitherto been "all of one language and one speech:" but now "God confounded their language, so that they could not understand one another." This introduced such confusion, that they could not prosecute their purpose, but were necessitated to form themselves into distinct societies, each uniting with the party whose speech he understood. From hence the knowledge of the true God was speedily lost; till in a few generations it seemed to have vanished from among the children of men. This knowledge however was revived in Abraham, and continued in a part of his posterity, till the time came that God had fixed for the diffusion of it over the face of the whole earth. The time so fixed was after the ascension of our blessed Lord: then was his Gospel to be preached to all nations: and, in order that it might be so, God reversed, as it were, the judgment he had before

before inflicted; not indeed by restoring an unity of language among all nations, but by enabling his chosen servants to address all people in their native tongue. This miracle is to be the subject of our present discourse: and we shall,

I. Make some observations for the illustration of it—

The miracle itself was the enabling of the Apostles, without any previous study, to speak with propriety and fluency whatever language was most familiar to their respective hearers; and to communicate unerring information on the great subject of religion, which, till that hour, they very imperfectly understood. Now, if we reflect how difficult it is even for men of learning to attain a new language, and how much time and study are necessary to acquire any proficiency in speaking it, we shall see how stupendous a miracle this was, which enabled a number of illiterate fishermen to address foreigners of different nations, whose language they had never so much as heard. But there are some peculiar circumstances respecting this miracle, to which we would call your more particular attention:

1. The *time* when it was wrought—

[There were in the year, three great Feasts, at which all the males in Israel were required to go up to Jerusalem; namely, the Passover, or Feast of Unleavened Bread; the Pentecost, or Feast of Weeks; and the Feast of Tabernacles. The first was appointed in commemoration of their deliverance from Egypt; and the second (the period referred to in our text) was held in remembrance of the giving the law from Mount Sinai, fifty days after their departure from Egypt[a]. Now God was pleased to make that very day on which he had proclaimed his law, the day for publishing his Gospel also; that so their connexion might the more plainly appear, and the one might be the more fully acknowledged as introductory to the other.

It is further to be remarked, that on the day of Pentecost "the *first-fruits*" of the wheat-harvest were offered unto God, as the first-fruits of the barley harvest had been seven weeks before[b]. This also, no doubt, was designed of God to typify the first-fruits of the Jewish Church, which were now presented unto him. It is certain that converts, whether from among

[a] Exod. xix. 1, 11. [b] Lev. xxiii. 15—17.

among Jews or Gentiles, were so designated[c], and especially the first in any place[d]: and consequently, the typical offering was, as it were, completed on this day, in the conversion of three thousand persons unto Christ.

Moreover, it is probable that the *anointing* of the first-fruits also had respect to the out-pouring of the Spirit upon the converts on this day[e]: for that very idea is distinctly suggested by St. Paul in reference to the Gentile converts, who were "brought by him as an offering in a clean vessel unto the Lord[f]," and were accepted of the Lord, "being *sanctified by the Holy Ghost*[g]."]

2. The *manner* in which it was wrought—

[As in the *time* of working the miracle we see *types fulfilled*, so in the *manner* of its being wrought we behold *emblems* illustrated and *realized*. The attention of the whole multitude was fixed by an appeal both to their eyes and ears. "They heard a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind." Our Lord compares the influences of the Spirit to wind: "The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit[h]." Who then must not recognise in this tempest the *inexplicable*, but *effectual*, operations of the Spirit on the minds of men?

At the same time "cloven tongues, like as of fire, appeared," and abode visibly on the head of all who were then assembled. Now we know, it is the property of fire to enlighten, to warm, to purify: and such were to be the effects of the Spirit which was poured out upon them; for whilst, by the diversity of tongues in which they spake; they communicated light and understanding to the world; they inflamed them with love to the Lord Jesus Christ, and transformed them into the very image of their God: and thus was the prophecy of John the Baptist accomplished; "I baptize you with water; but He that cometh after me shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and *with fire*[i]."]

Such was the miracle, which however interesting in itself, derives a still greater interest from the circumstances before referred to. We now proceed to,

II. Suggest some reflections for the improvement of it—

The decided proof which it gave of Christ's Messiahship, and of the power and glory to which he is exalted,

[c] Jam. i. 18. Rev. xiv. 4. [d] Rom. xvi. 5. [e] Lev. ii. 1.
[f] Isai. lxvi. 20. [g] Rom. xv. 16. [h] John iii. 8.
[i] Matt. iii. 11.

exalted, must naturally suggest itself to every mind. We therefore wave the consideration of the miracle in that view, (more especially as we propose to notice it in the following discourse;) and confine our attention to other reflections less obvious, but equally important:

1. What rich provision has God made for the salvation of the world!

[Was the gift of his only dear Son necessary to redeem us from death and hell? He so loved the world as to give his Son for us. Was more necessary? Was it necessary that the third Person of the blessed Trinity should bear testimony to Christ, and qualify persons to make him known to the world, and actually render their labours effectual for that end? Behold, God sent his Holy Spirit to work this stupendous miracle in confirmation of Christ's Messiahship, and to endue his servants with such powers as were necessary for the preaching of his Gospel to every creature, and to convert to the faith of Christ thousands who but lately had crucified him as a malefactor. What then will he not do for those who desire to be saved? What will *he* refuse us, who has, unsought and unsolicited, done such great things for us? Let us bear in mind that *we* are as much interested in these things as those who lived in the Apostolic age; for "the promise is to us, and to our children, and to as many as the Lord our God shall call"———]

2. What a striking resemblance appears between the events of that day, and the period wherein we live!

[We confess that miracles have ceased, and that the operations of the Spirit are no longer audible in sounds, or visible in tongues of fire: but have they therefore ceased? No: we affirm that they yet exist; and *that* too in no common measure or degree. Persons, it is true, are not enabled to address themselves successively, without any previous study, to foreigners of every country in their own vernacular tongue; but persons are stirred up to study different languages, and to translate the Scriptures into those languages, so that persons of every country may adopt the same acknowledgment as was used on the day of Pentecost; "We do every man, in his own tongue, hear spoken to us the wonderful works of God[k]." Nor is this effect produced in any slight or partial degree; for persons of every rank, and almost of every nation, are contributing to this blessed end. In our own nation, such an attention has been excited to this work as

[k] ver. 6, 8, 11.

as has never been known since the Apostolic age. Nobles, as well as others, have united in disseminating the Holy Scriptures, and in spreading the knowledge of them to the ends of the earth. Is not this work of God? Yes; and, by whomsoever it be opposed, it shall stand; nor shall all the powers of hell prevail against it[l].]

3. How certainly may we expect, ere long, a yet greater work!

[God has reserved in his own power the times and the seasons wherein he will work: but he has assured us, that in due time "the knowledge of the Lord shall cover the earth as the waters cover the sea:" and we have reason to believe that that time is fast approaching. Behold with what astonishing rapidity the work has been carried forward of late! In this land, Schools have been set on foot for the education of the poor; so that in a little time we may hope they will be established in almost every town and village in the kingdom. At the same time, Bibles have been so liberally dispersed, that no poor person who desires to possess that heavenly treasure, needs to continue destitute of it. A similar kind of spirit has been diffused through other countries, where even crowned heads[m] are contributing to advance the glorious Cause. Above all, the very same means as Providence used for the speedy establishment of Christianity throughout the Roman Empire, are at this moment provided against the time that the Spirit shall be poured out to convert the world. At the Passover, the Jews throughout divers countries assembled at Jerusalem, and went home to report what they had seen and heard respecting the death and resurrection of Christ. At the day of Pentecost they did the same, in reference to the ascension of Christ, and the descent of the Holy Spirit, and the instantaneous conversion of thousands to the faith of Christ. Reporting these things in their respective cities, they prepared the way for the ministry of the Apostles, and excited the greatest attention to them. Thus at this day, Jews are spread over all the earth, and for their use the New Testament is translated into Hebrew; at the same time that translations are going forward into all the languages of the world; insomuch that we may hope, in the space of twenty or thirty years, there will be no nation that shall not possess the Scriptures, or at least a considerable portion of them, in their own language. Moreover, there is a Society formed for the express purpose of converting the Jews, and of educating their children in the Christian faith. If then God be pleased to send forth his Spirit upon the Jews by means of the Scriptures

[l] In the year 1812.

[m] The Emperor of Russia, and the Kings of Prussia, Sweden, &c.

tures which are translated into *their* language, there will be Missionaries without number already found in every country under heaven, conversant with the habits and languages of the people among whom they dwell, and able to explain to them the Scriptures which have been previously translated into their respective tongues. What a glorious prospect does this open to us! O that God would even now pour forth his Spirit upon all flesh, that "his word might run and be glorified throughout the earth!"]

DCCCLII.

SEPARATION FROM THE UNGODLY RECOMMENDED.

Acts ii. 30. *And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation.*

IT is in many respects a great advantage to us that we have the holy Scriptures comprised in so small a space: for if they had been very voluminous, they would have been far less accessible to the poor, and few even of the rich would have found leisure or inclination to peruse them. One cannot however but feel a kind of regret that some particular parts have not been more copiously transmitted to us. What an inestimable treasure, for instance, should we have possessed, if the whole of our Lord's discourse with the two Disciples in their way to Emmaus had been preserved[a]! So it would, doubtless, have been a rich feast to our souls, if every part of Peter's first sermon, whereby three thousand sinners were converted to God, had been recorded. But we must be contented to gather up the fragments which are left us in the Inspired Volume, and study with the more diligence those records which God has deemed sufficient for us. The substance of the Apostle's sermon we have in the foregoing context; and the application of it, in the words of our text. It is with the latter that we are at present concerned: and for a just improvement of it, we shall consider,

I. His testimony—

We cannot doubt but that "he *testified*" of Christ as

[a] Luke xxiv. 27.

as the true Messiah, and shewed from the Scriptures that his death and resurrection were the means which God had appointed for the salvation of a ruined world. But it is evident, that, as he testified *for Christ*, so he testified *against that generation*, whom he reproved as an "untoward generation." But what ground was there for ascribing to them this character? Surely there was abundant reason for the appellation, even though it had been still more severe: for they were,

1. An impenitent generation—

[John the Baptist, our Lord himself, and all his Apostles, had, for the space of four years, preached among them, saying, "*Repent*, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand[b]." Yet, like their forefathers, they would not hear[c]. They were even more obdurate than the Heathen: for the Ninevites had repented at the preaching of Jonas; and even the Sodomites themselves would have repented, had they heard such preaching as our Lord's; but the people of that generation would "not regard the voice of the charmer, though he charmed them never so wisely[d]." They were satisfied with their descent from Abraham, and thought that their relation to him was a certain pledge of their acceptance with God[e]. These things were subjects of complaint against them, and strongly characterized the people at large[f].

And do we see here no resemblance to the present generation? The people of this land have thousands of monitors, who call them to repentance: yet whom do we see smiting on their breasts and imploring mercy? Who calls himself to account, "saying, What have I done?" "Who asks, Where is God, my Maker?" Because we are *called* Christians, we imagine ourselves to *be* Christians, even though *we could not mention one single particular wherein we resemble Christ.* All that die are, as a matter of course, supposed to go to heaven, even though they never took one step in the way that leads thither. Say then, whether the appellation given to *them*, be not suitable to *us* also?]

2. An unbelieving generation—

[The Scriptures were publickly read and expounded in their synagogues every sabbath-day. To them also our blessed Lord appealed as testifying of him[g]: and he confirmed his word with miracles unnumbered. Yet did the whole nation,

[b] Matt. iii. 2. Mark i. 15. & vi. 12.
[c] Jer. vii. 23, 24. Zech. vii. 11, 12.
[d] Matt. xi. 20. & xii. 41.
[e] Matt. iii. 8, 9. John viii. 33—41.
[f] Matt. xxi. 31, 32.
[g] John v. 39.

nation, except a few individuals, reject him: so that the complaint which had many hundred years before been uttered against them by the prophet, was abundantly verified[h].

Would to God there were less occasion to involve the present generation also in the same condemnation! We have the Scriptures, which are appealed to by every faithful Minister of Christ. But who believes what we say? Who believes the necessity of conversion to God? Who believes, that, "unless he be born again he can never enter into the kingdom of God?" and that "without real, universal holiness, no man can see the Lord?" That men *profess* to believe these things, we acknowledge: but who follows after the attainment of them, and evinces the sincerity of his faith by the earnestness of his exertions? A little gleaning of Believers may be found; but the harvest is borne away by unbelief.]

3. A persecuting generation—

[In every age the Jews had persecuted their Prophets unto death: and that generation filled up the measure of their fathers' iniquities, by "crucifying the Lord of Glory." Against the Apostles also they raged with insatiable fury, and against all that called upon the name of Christ.

It is true, we do not, in this age, see crosses erected, and fires kindled, for the destruction of the Lord's people: but has persecution ceased? Is not a life of real godliness still hated by the world? Does it not invariably become an object of reproach; and do not the opprobrious names given to religious people lower them in the estimation of others, insomuch that all their good qualities are lost sight of, and they are deemed worthy only of pity and contempt? No thanks to the world, then, that fires are not kindled as much as ever: it is to our laws, and to the providence of our God, we owe it, that bounds are prescribed, beyond which the enmity of men is no longer suffered to exert itself. But it is still as true as ever, that "all who will live godly in Christ Jesus, shall suffer persecution[i]."]

But let us pass on to,

II. His exhortation—

St. Peter well knew, that all who retained their enmity against God and his Christ, must soon perish: he therefore exhorted his hearers to save themselves from the impending ruin. The same exhortation befits us also. Is it asked, How are we to save ourselves from this untoward generation?

We answer,

1. Renounce

[h] Isa. liii. 1. with John xii. 38. & Rom. x. 16. [i] 2 Tim. iii. 12.

1. Renounce their ways—

[Judge ye, Whither such ways must lead. Need you be told, that, "except ye repent, ye must all perish;" or, that, "if ye believe not, ye cannot see life, but the wrath of God abideth on you;" or, that all who make Christ "a stumbling-stone will be broken in pieces?" Deceive not yourselves: think not that the number of your associates will afford you any security: *numbers* did not protect the inhabitants of the plain, or the antediluvian world; nor shall you find the termination of the broad road any other than you have been forewarned concerning it. Of this you may rest assured, that "whatsoever you sow, you shall also reap: if you sow to the flesh, you shall, of the flesh, reap corruption: you must sow to the Spirit, if you would, of the Spirit, reap life everlasting."]

2. Forsake their company—

[We know that you cannot entirely separate from the ungodly; for then, as the Apostle says, "ye must needs go out of the world." But you are not to choose them as your companions; for, "what communion hath light with darkness, and Christ with Belial?" It is not sufficient that you "have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness; you must also reprove them[k]." Need you be told, what even a Heathen writer could declare, that "evil communications corrupt good manners[l]?" Do you not know, that men insensibly imbibe the spirit of their associates; and that you must "come out from Babylon, if you would not be partakers of her sins and of her plagues[m]?" Know assuredly, that "a companion of fools will be destroyed[n];" and that, if you belong to Christ, "you will not be of the world[o]." I say to you therefore, in the words of the great Apostle, "Come out from among them, and be separate; and touch not the unclean thing; and I will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty[p]."]

3. Devote yourselves entirely to the Lord—

[The conduct of those whom the Apostle addressed, will form the best comment on his exhortation. His converts instantly applied to Christ for the forgiveness of their sins, and devoted themselves unreservedly to his service: and from that day "continued in the Apostles' fellowship," (not the fellowship of their former companions,) and in the unremitted exercise

[k] Eph. v. 11.
[l] 1 Cor. xv. 33. This is a quotation from Menander.
[m] Rev. xviii. 4. [n] Prov. xiii. 20. [o] John xvii. 16.
[p] 2 Cor. vi. 14—18.

exercise of piety and love[q]. We say not that you are to neglect your worldly callings; (nothing can be further from our wishes, or from your duty, than this:) but you must begin from this time to "live no longer to yourselves, but unto him who died for you, and rose again." "Instead of being any longer conformed to this world, you must be transformed in the renewing of your minds, proving what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God." To all of you then I say, Save yourselves in this manner; escape thus from the contagion and ruin of this untoward generation. Give yourselves up to God, as your reconciled God in Christ Jesus: do it without fear——— do it without reserve——— do it without delay ———Then, when the impenitent and unbelieving part of this generation shall eat the bitter fruit of their doings, you shall be numbered with "the generation of the righteous," even of them that sought and served their God[r].]

[q] ver. 41—47. [r] Ps. xiv. 5. & xxiv. 6. & cxii. 2.

DCCCLIII.

JESUS IS THE CHRIST.

Acts ii. 36. *Therefore let all the House of Israel know assuredly that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ.*

WHEN we consider the advantages possessed by the Apostles, we are astonished to find how slow of heart they were to receive and understand the great mystery of the Gospel salvation. Not only before the death of their Lord, but after his resurrection, yea, and after all his appearances to them, and the fresh instructions given them during the space of forty days, they could not divest themselves of the idea of a temporal kingdom. Not an hour before his ascension to heaven, they asked him, "Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?" But from the day of Pentecost there was no more of doubt upon their minds respecting any fundamental point of our religion. For some years indeed they retained their prejudices about the Gentiles, not conceiving that they were to be admitted to a full participation of the blessings of the Gospel: but, respecting Christ, and his salvation, they were fully instructed;

instructed, and never spake but with the most unshaken confidence. This appears from the very first sermon which was delivered by any one of them. St. Peter argued with as strong a persuasion of mind as he possessed at any future period; and without hesitation affirmed, in the presence of thousands of his countrymen, that Jesus, even the very person whom they had crucified, was indeed the Christ, the true Messiah[a].

His words are evidently the close of an argument: and, as they are delivered with peculiar confidence, it will be proper to consider,

I. The force of his reasoning—

Our Lord, according to his promise, had poured out the Spirit in a visible manner on his Disciples, whereby they were enabled to speak a great variety of languages, which gift was emblematically represented by the appearance of cloven tongues, as of fire. The circumstance of their immediately addressing all persons in their native tongues, excited the greatest astonishment: but those who understood not the particular language which they spake, represented them as in a state of intoxication. In vindication of himself and his associates, the Apostle just observes, that such an imputation was absurd, since none but the most abandoned of men could have been drinking to intoxication so early as nine o'clock in the morning, and *that* upon a solemn feast-day, when they were about to worship God in his Temple; and then proceeds to argue with them respecting the Messiahship of Christ, as proved by this event. He states,

1. That this miraculous gift was foretold by the prophet Joel, as to be conferred by the Messiah—

[The passage cited from the prophet Joel undoubtedly refers to the times of the Messiah[aa]. Previous to that time the Holy Spirit had been given only in a very partial way to a few: but, when Christ should be glorified, he was to be poured

[a] The order of the words in the Greek makes the expression very emphatical.

[aa] Compare ver. 16—21. with Joel ii. 28—32.

poured out, as it were, upon multitudes, both of men and women, that by his miraculous operations he might testify of Christ, and by his efficacious grace he might bring men to Christ.

After this should have been done for a space of time sufficient to evince the distinguished kindness of God towards his antient people, and their incorrigible obstinacy towards him, God would give them signs of a very different kind; even such terrible signs, as should be like "turning the sun into darkness, and the moon into blood;" and then should destruction come upon them to the uttermost: but as, *previously to* that period, all who should believe in Christ should be saved from the condemnation in which all others would be involved, so, *at* that period, all his believing people should escape the miseries which would overwhelm the residue of that devoted nation.

This was the plain meaning of the prophecy, which at this time began to be fulfilled; and which in due season, should receive a perfect accomplishment.]

2. That this gift was actually conferred by Jesus—

[It was known to all of them, that Jesus, during his ministry on earth, had wrought innumerable miracles in confirmation of his word and doctrine: and though the nation had put him to an ignominious death, yet had God raised him from the dead, and empowered him to send forth the Spirit in the manner he had done.

With respect to the truth of his resurrection, it had been foretold in terms that could be applicable to him alone[b]. It could not be of himself that David spake those words; for *he* did die, and see corruption; and his tomb remained even to the Apostle's days: but *Jesus* saw no corruption: *his* soul was not left in the place of departed spirits, nor was *his* body permitted to continue in the grave long enough to undergo any change: he rose on the third day, as all his Disciples could testify, because they had themselves seen him on that day, and occasionally conversed familiarly with him for forty days afterwards, even to the very hour when in their presence he ascended up to heaven. Moreover he had expressly told them that he would send down the Holy Ghost upon them, in the manner he had done: and therefore it must be HE, and none other but HE, that had wrought the miracles which they now saw and heard[c].

If they should still be inclined to think that *David* had had any concern in this miracle, the Apostle called their attention to another prophecy of his, wherein David himself declared, that the person who should be thus invested with power at the

[b] Compare ver. 23—28. with Psalm xvi. 8—11 [c] ver. 29—32

the right hand of God, was his LORD; and that the person so exalted, should "make all his foes his footstool[d]."

It was evident therefore, that, as the Messiah was to rise from the dead, and ascend up to heaven for the purpose of establishing his kingdom upon earth; and as Jesus had risen and ascended agreeably to those predictions; there could be no doubt but that it was HE who had now sent down the Spirit, according to the promise which he had given them. He had told them, but a few days before, that he would send forth upon them the promise of the Father, and baptize them with the Holy Ghost[e]; and he had now done it in a way which commended itself to the eyes and ears of all the people.]

3. That therefore Jesus must unquestionably be the true Messiah—

[It was not in the power of any creature to work the miracles now wrought: nor would the Father work them in order to confirm the claims of an impostor. They must of necessity therefore have been wrought by Jesus, who had thereby proved himself the true Messiah.

On these grounds Peter declared to them, that, as they could not doubt the existence of those prophecies, or the application of them to the Messiah, or the miracle now wrought by Jesus in confirmation of his claim to that office, "the whole House of Israel might know assuredly, that God had made that very Jesus, whom they had crucified, both Lord and Christ."]

Such was the Apostle's reasoning: and from the confident manner in which he expressed himself, we are led to notice,

II. The importance of his conclusion—

If God has constituted Jesus both Lord and Christ, then,

1. We must look to him as our Lord and Saviour—

[The force of this was felt by Peter's audience, insomuch that three thousand of them instantly obeyed the heavenly mandate, and surrendered up themselves to be saved and governed by him alone. Precisely in this manner must we devote ourselves to him: we must not be contented with "calling him Lord, Lord," but must feel the same need of him as they did, and cast ourselves upon him for mercy, and consecrate ourselves entirely to his service[f]. We must admit no other ground of hope but his obedience unto death———we must suffer no "other Lord to have dominion over us:"———but, having

[d] Compare ver. 34, 35. with Ps. cx. 1. [e] Acts i. 4, 5.
[f] ver. 37, 38.

having been bought by him with his most precious blood; we must "glorify him with our bodies and our spirits, which are his."]

2. He is all-sufficient for us—

[Whatever we can want, he is exalted to bestow. Do we need forgiveness of sins? He is empowered to grant it. Do we need repentance? He can impart that also. This we are assured of, on the testimony of Peter and all the other Apostles. What joyful tidings are these! Hear them, all ye who are labouring under a sense of guilt; and know, that "the blood of Jesus Christ is able to cleanse you from all sin:" ———and ye, who mourn on account of the hardness of your hearts, know that he can "take away the heart of stone, and give you an heart of flesh"———If God the Father has constituted him "Head over all things to the Church," you need not fear, but that there shall be found in his fulness an ample supply for all your necessities[s]———]

3. None shall ever look to him in vain—

["Him that cometh unto me," says Christ, "I will in no wise cast out." What then have we to do with desponding thoughts? Has God thus exalted his Son, and will he disappoint those who trust in him? No: it cannot be: "he never did," nor ever will, "say to the seed of Jacob, Seek ye my face in vain." Did the vilest person in the universe only desire mercy as much as He delights to exercise it, he would in one instant be purged from all his sin———We need only look to the effect of Peter's sermon on the murderous Jews, and we shall see a perfect pattern of what God is ready to do for us, the very instant we believe in Jesus——— May God make this another Pentecost to our souls, for his mercy's sake! Amen.]

[s] St. Paul pursues the same line of argument as St. Peter, and founds upon it this consolatory truth. Acts xiii. 35—39. See also Heb. vii. 25.

DCCCLIV.

REPENTANCE EXEMPLIFIED IN THE FIRST CONVERTS.

Acts ii. 37—39. Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the Apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do? Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost; for the promise is unto

unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call.

THE doctrine of a crucified Saviour is that which God has exclusively honoured in converting sinners to himself. The terrors of Mount Sinaï are often used by him to awaken men from their slumbers; but it is "the law of faith," as published from Mount Zion, that alone captivates the souls of men. It was this, which, when exhibited in types and shadows, overcame the Saints under the Jewish dispensation: and no sooner was it plainly preached by the Apostles, than thousands yielded to its all-powerful influence. The manner in which it operated we may see in the text. St. Peter had charged home upon his hearers the guilt of crucifying the Lord Jesus; and had declared that God had exalted that very Jesus to be the Sovereign "Lord" of all, and to be the "Christ," the anointed Saviour of the world[a]. Instantly was a wonderful effect produced on the whole assembly; in order to illustrate which, we shall notice,

I. The penitent's inquiry—

In the question which these first converts put, each to the Apostle who stood nearest to him, we may observe,

1. Deep contrition—

[They were "pricked to the heart" with a sense of all their sins, and especially the sin of crucifying the Lord Jesus. And we also must be humbled in like manner; seeing that our sins were *the procuring cause* of Christ's death[b]; yea, and we have crucified him afresh ten thousand times by our continuance in sin[c].]

2. Extreme earnestness—

[Nothing lay so near their hearts, as to obtain the knowledge of salvation. Thus must we also feel our whole souls engaged in this great concern.]

3. A determination to comply with God's terms, whatever they should be—

[This is one of the strongest and most unequivocal marks of true penitence. And it must shew itself in us, as well as in

[a] ver. 36 [b] Isai. liii. 4, 5. [c] Heb. vi. 4—6.

in them. We must not dispute about the terms, as *too humiliating*, or *too strict*, but be willing to be saved on the conditions prescribed in the Gospel.]

4. A respectful regard for those whom they once hated for their attachment to Christ—

[The Apostles had addressed them in these respectful and affectionate terms, "Men and Brethren." They now, in their turn, use the same language toward the Apostles; though but one hour before, no words would have been too harsh to use in invectives against them. Thus must our hearts also be turned towards the Ministers and the disciples of Christ, however much we may have before hated and despised them. Nor are our inquiries after salvation such as they ought to be, if they be not accompanied with *all* these marks of penitence and contrition.]

This inquiry was not in vain, as we may see from,

II. God's answer to it—

The reply given by God's ambassador, contains,

1. A plain direction—

[The term "repent" imports in this place *a change of mind*[d]; and it refers to their former apprehensions of Christ: they had lately crucified him as an impostor; now they must be persuaded that he was the true Messiah; yea, they must rely on his death as an atonement offered for them, and seek the remission of their sins through him alone: they must moreover "be baptized in his name," and become his avowed, his faithful disciples.

Such is the direction given to every one of us. We have scarcely thought Christ at all worthy of our regard; now he must be "precious to us," "fairer than ten thousand, and altogether lovely."

We must renounce every self-righteous method of seeking acceptance with God, and believe in him for the remission of our sins.

We need not indeed be baptized again; but we must do that which was implied in this part of the direction: we must give up ourselves to Christ in a perpetual covenant; we must join ourselves to his Church and people; we must confess him openly in the midst of a persecuting and ungodly world.]

2. A rich encouragement—

[The Apostle told them, that "they should receive the gift of the Holy Ghost." We do not apprehend that this promise extended solely, or even primarily, to the miraculous powers

[d] μετανοήσατε.

powers with which the Apostles were invested; for it was made to all Believers who should ever be called into the Church of God: we apprehend it referred chiefly to those sanctifying and saving operations of the Spirit which are necessary for all people in every age. All need the Holy Spirit to instruct and guide them into all truth, to strengthen them for their spiritual warfare, to comfort them under their afflictions, to renew them after the Divine image, and to make them "meet for their heavenly inheritance:" and for these ends and purposes did the Apostle engage that they should experience his operations.

He assured them that the promise of the Spirit for these ends and purposes was given to *all* who should believe in Christ. Accordingly we find that that promise was made[e]; that it was a part of the covenant of grace[f]; and that Jesus Christ himself referred to it *as made in the Old Testament*, and *as to be fulfilled under the Christian dispensation*, to *all who should believe in him*[g]: and St. Paul also mentions it as included in the promise made to Abraham, to be purchased by Christ for his believing seed, and to be conferred upon them all without distinction[h].

What further encouragement could they need? Were they guilty? the blood of Christ would cleanse them? Were they polluted? the Holy Ghost would sanctify them: he would come and dwell in them as in his temples, and perfect in them the good work that was now begun. The same promise is now made to us; and shall be fulfilled to all who seek for mercy through Christ alone ———]

APPLICATION—

[Some possibly may be led to question whether this subject be properly addressed to *them*: since, having never crucified Christ, as the Jews did, they need not "repent;" and having been "baptized in the name of Christ," they have "received the remission of their sins," and "the gift of the Holy Ghost:" they have also been taught in their Catechism, "What they must do to be saved;" and therefore need not, like those in our text, to make that inquiry.

But who amongst us has not "crucified the Son of God afresh," by a continuance in sin? Who has not, in numberless instances, done what he ought not, and left undone what he ought to have done? Consequently, *we* need to repent as much as *they* ———and need also, as much as they, to apply to Christ for the remission of our sins ——— Moreover, let any man look at his in-dwelling corruptions, and say, whether he do not need the influences of the Spirit, to mortify and subdue them: let him also look at his duties, and say,

[e] Isai. xliv. 3.
[f] Isai. lix. 21.
[g] John vii. 37—39.
[h] Gal. iii. 14.

say, whether he do not need the Spirit to strengthen him for a more suitable performance of them———Brethren, the name of Christians, or a form of godliness, will profit us little. Religion must be taken up by us, as it was by the Jews, as a matter of infinite importance, and of indispensable necessity. Like them we must be humbled; like them must flee to Christ for mercy: like them must become his faithful followers. Let all of us then "look to Him, as pierced" for our sins; and expect from him that divine Comforter, who "shall teach us all things," and work in us as effectually for our salvation, as he wrought in Christ for his exaltation to glory[f]."]

[f] Eph. i. 19—21.

DCCCLV.

THE STATE OF THE PRIMITIVE CHRISTIANS.

Acts ii. 44—47. *And all that believed were together, and had all things common; and sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need. And they, continuing daily with one accord in the Temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the Church daily such as should be saved.*

THE true nature of Christianity would be very imperfectly discovered by any one who should look for it in the conduct of the Christian world. The generality of those who name the name of Christ, differ but little from those who never heard of his name. And even among those who profess a regard for religion, there is but a small measure of that spirit which may be discerned among the early converts. In the Churches of this day will be found a form of godliness, but very little of its power. We must go to the Scriptures, and to the accounts given us of the first Christians, to see what vital religion is. There we behold it in all its purity. Let us contemplate it as exhibited by those who were converted on the day of Pentecost. In our text we may behold,

I. Their charity—

This was more extensive than any that can be found on record in the annals of the world. A few individuals perhaps may be found, who have evinced an

an unbounded love towards those who had been long connected with them in the ties of friendship: but here the whole body of Believers were animated by the same spirit towards each other, even towards those whom they had never so much as seen till that hour: all were divested of every selfish feeling, and sacrificed their own personal interests for the good of the whole.

But here arises an important question; "Is their conduct in this particular a model for our imitation?" I answer,

We certainly are not called to perform the same specific *act*—

[*That act arose out of the circumstances of the Church at that time.* Some indeed have suggested, that they acted thus from an assured expectation that either they should be speedily dispossessed of their property by the violence of persecution, or that they should ere long suffer the loss of it in the general destruction of the Jewish polity. But such an idea as this divests their conduct of all its excellence; since it is no virtue at all to sell what they knew would be taken from them, and to give away what they could not retain. They proceeded on far different grounds from these. Of the multitude who were converted, great numbers came from a distance to the feast, not expecting to continue at Jerusalem more than a few days: but now that they were led to just views of Christianity, they would on no account lose the opportunities they enjoyed of obtaining further instruction from their inspired teachers: of course therefore, unless assisted by others, they must be left destitute of necessary food: and, if necessitated to depend on others who were enemies to this new religion, they could expect but little aid, and would therefore be under a strong temptation to renounce Christianity as soon as they had embraced it. Besides, of those who lived at Jerusalem, many would probably become objects of virulent persecution, so as to be deprived of all that they possessed; and therefore that none might be reduced to abject want, the whole body formed one common stock for the supply of all; the richer making their abundance a supply for the necessities of the more indigent[a]. This however was perfectly voluntary on their part; for St. Peter told Ananias that he was under no obligation to part with his property[b]; and the whole tenor of Scripture supposes that there must be different ranks and orders of men, who

[a] Compare ch. iv. 32, 34, 35. [b] Ch. v. 4.

who are called to the performance of distinct and appropriate duties[c].]

But the *principle* from which they acted is of universal and unalterable obligation—

[Love was the principle by which they were actuated: and it is characteristic of love, that "it seeketh not its own[d]:" it puts off selfishness, and seeks its happiness in contributing to the happiness of others. A person under the influence of this principle considers all that he possesses as belonging to God, and as a talent with which he is entrusted for the benefit of mankind. Hence he is "glad to distribute, and willing to communicate," whenever a just occasion for liberality presents itself, and "especially towards the household of faith:" and if the particular circumstances of the Church call for such a sacrifice, he is ready, as far as the occasion requires it, to comply *literally* with that command of Christ, "Sell that ye have, and give alms[e];" for whatever treasure he may possess on earth, his chief desire is to "have treasure in heaven." True indeed it is, that there are not many who, like the Macedonians, "give according to their power, yea and beyond their power[f];" and fewer still who, like the poor widow, give their last mite unto the Lord: in too many instances there is rather reason to complain with St. Paul, that "all men seek their own, and not the things of Jesus Christ:" but still the injunction, "Seek not every man his own, but every man another's wealth," is as much in force as ever; and we ought, if called to it, to "lay down," not our property only, but even our own lives for the Brethren."]

Of an equally exalted kind was,

II. Their piety—

They gave themselves up wholly, as it were, to the exercises of religion. But here the same question, as before, recurs; How far was their conduct in this respect a model for our imitation? And the same answer must be returned to it:

We are not called to follow them in *the act*—

[The occasion was so peculiar, as to justify, and even require, a peculiar mode of acting. Our circumstances are extremely different from theirs. We have duties which cannot be neglected, without great injury to society, and dishonour to God: and, if every one, from the moment that he became religious,

[c] The command given to the Rich Youth was also peculiar to *him*. Luke xviii. 22.

[d] 1 Cor. xiii. 5. [e] Luke xii. 33, 34. [f] 2 Cor. viii. 3, 4.

religious, were to lay aside all his worldly business, he would place in the way of the ungodly such a stumbling-block as would prove almost subversive of Christianity itself. "To do our own business," and "not to be slothful in business," are as much commanded, as to "be fervent in spirit, serving the Lord." We therefore cannot be called to such a line of conduct as is incompatible with the discharge of all our social duties.]

But *in principle* we must resemble them—

[They gave themselves up wholly unto God: and so "must it also be our meat and drink to do the will of our heavenly Father." We must "love him with all our heart, and mind, and soul, and strength;" and "yield up to him our bodies and our souls a living sacrifice," and "glorify him with our bodies and our spirits, which are his." Whatever be our calling in life, there can be no reason why we should not "delight ourselves in God," and "live, not to ourselves, but unto him that died for us and rose again." Why should not every one of us have the same frame of mind as David, whose duties must certainly have been as numerous and important as any that we are called to perform[g]? We cannot, as has been before observed, be constantly *engaged in* religious duties; but we may have our hearts always disposed for the enjoyment of them[h]: and it is certainly incumbent on us to embrace all seasonable opportunities of waiting upon God in the church, and at his table, and in our families and the closet. Our daily intercourse with our friends should also be improved for the advancement of true religion, and every returning meal should afford us an occasion of enjoying and glorifying our heavenly Benefactor[i]. It is our privilege, as much as that of the primitive Christians, to "eat our meat with gladness and singleness of heart, blessing and praising God."]

With such knowledge of their conduct we may expect to hear of,

III. Their increase—

Their conduct conciliated the regard of all the people—

[Doubtless the natural man hates the light, because the evil of his own ways is exposed by it. Yet there is something in true religion which approves its excellence, even to the very people who hate it. Herod, from a full conviction that "John was a just and holy man, feared him," and complied with his advice

[g] Ps. lxiii. 1—5. & lxxxiv. 1—4, 10. [h] 1 Thess. v. 16—18.
[i] 1 John i. 3.

advice in many particulars; though afterwards he imprisoned him, and put him to death. Thus the wonderful change that was wrought upon the first converts, from selfishness to charity, and from irreligion to the most exalted piety, excited the admiration and the love of all.

How blessed is it, where the conduct of professors is so exemplary, as "to put to silence the ignorance of foolish men," and to engage the esteem of those who are condemned by it! We must not indeed expect always to *secure* the favour of men; but we should endeavour so to act as to *deserve* it.]

Their numbers also were increased from day to day—

[Doubtless conversion is the fruit of Divine grace alone: "Whether Paul plant, or Apollos water, it is God only that can give the increase." Yet God uses various means to accomplish this work; and one of peculiar efficacy is, the conduct of his people: by that he "puts to silence the ignorance of foolish men," and constrains them to "glorify him in the day of visitation." It is highly probable that the exalted piety and unbounded charity of the first converts were greatly instrumental to the conversion of those around them. Every one of them was a preacher in his own house, by his actions at least, if not by words. And Oh! what might not be hoped for, if all, who profess religion, breathed the spirit that displayed itself at that period of the Church? Truly, many might be awakened to a concern for their souls, and be constrained to say, "We will go with you; for we perceive that God is with you of a truth." Let this be borne in mind, as an incentive to a continual progress in holiness; and let us strive "so to make our light shine before men, that others, beholding our good works, may glorify our Father which is in heaven."]

We may LEARN from hence,

1. At what a low ebb religion is amongst us!

[If we compare our attainments with those recorded in our text, what reason shall we see to blush and be ashamed! How has selfishness triumphed over charity, and lukewarmness assumed the place of piety! But let us not imagine that religion is different now from what it was in that day. Some difference in our mode of exercising religion may justly be admitted: but in our spirit there should be no difference at all: God is the same gracious God as ever; his Gospel is as worthy of all acceptation as ever; and the blessings we receive by means of it are as great as ever: and therefore we ought to feel its power and evince its efficacy, as much as others have done at any period of the Church. Let us then

set

set this example before our eyes, and endeavour to walk even as they walked.]

2. How we may be instrumental to the increase of the Church—

[Much may be done, very much, by every member of the Church of Christ. The influence of a bright example is still as great as ever. As any instance of misconduct in professors hardens others against the truth, so the beauty of holiness exhibited by them has a powerful tendency to win the souls of adversaries. If, on the one hand, by an uncharitable or irreligious deportment, we may "destroy many souls for whom Christ died," so, by a life becoming the Gospel, we may "win many who never would have obeyed the preached word." Let us then attend to our conduct in every state and circumstance of life: let us look well to the whole of our spirit and temper, that we may not even in the smallest matter "cause the enemy to speak reproachfully," but rather may "adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things."]

DCCCLVI.

THE CRIPPLE HEALED BY PETER.

Acts iv. 8—10. *Then Peter, filled with the Holy Ghost, said unto them, Ye Rulers of the people, and Elders of Israel, if we this day be examined of the good deed done to the impotent man, by what means he is made whole; be it known unto you, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, even by him doth this man stand here before you whole.*

PERSECUTION for righteousness' sake was foretold by Christ as the portion of all his people: and accordingly we find, that no sooner did his Apostles begin to publish the glad tidings of salvation, than they were arrested as criminals, and brought into a court of justice to answer for their conduct. Peter and John had healed a man who had been "lame from his mother's womb." In consequence of this, multitudes were gathered together, to inquire into this miracle, and to learn by what means it had been wrought. Peter declared to them all, that it had been wrought by that very Jesus, who

had so recently been crucified by them, but who was risen from the dead, and possessed of all power in heaven and in earth[a]. This testimony was the means of converting an immense number of persons to the faith of Christ[b]. But it grieved and incensed the Rulers, who immediately adopted measures to crush the rising sect; apprehending and imprisoning the two Apostles, and on the very next day bringing them to trial as disturbers of the public peace. Peter renewed the testimony he had before given, and persisted in declaring, that the miracle had been wrought by Jesus of Nazareth, in proof that he was risen from the dead, and was the true Messiah, the Saviour of the world.

In considering this miracle, we shall notice it,

I. As a ground of conviction to the Jews—

That a great miracle had been wrought, was manifest to all, insomuch that the Rulers themselves were constrained to acknowledge it[c]. Hence Peter took occasion to shew them,

1. That Jesus was indeed the promised Messiah—

[It was obviously beyond the power of man to effect so great a work, as that of restoring in a moment to the perfect use of his limbs "a man who was forty years of age," and had been a cripple from the womb. Whence then did Peter and John obtain the power to effect it? This was the point which the Rulers desired to ascertain[d]; and this could be learned only from the Apostles themselves. Peter boldly answered the interrogatories which were put to him; and declared, that the lately-crucified, and now exalted, Jesus had empowered them to communicate this blessing to the man[dd]. But how could he convey to them this power, if he were not himself alive? or how could he enable them to do what nothing but Omnipotence could effect, if he himself were not omnipotent?

This argument was addressed to the very people who had bribed the soldiers a few weeks before to say, that the Disciples had come, whilst *they* were asleep, and had stolen the body of Jesus from the tomb. But though the Rulers had satisfied their nation by accounting in that manner for the supposed resurrection of Jesus, they did not now dare to bring forward

[a] Ch. iii. 1—16. [b] ver. 4. [c] ver. 14, 16.
[d] ver. 7. [dd] Ch. iii. 16.

forward such an absurdity in answer to the Apostles: for of what use would the dead body of Jesus be? could that enable the Apostles to work a miracle? or would God communicate miraculous powers to them for the express purpose of sanctioning the most wicked falsehood that could be fabricated?

Here then the argument was incontrovertible: A miracle had been wrought: the persons who had been the instruments of effecting it, ascribed the power to Jesus, who, *agreeably to the prophecies concerning him*, had been "set at nought by the builders, and was become the Head of the corner[e]:" there was therefore no alternative left, but to acknowledge Jesus as the true Messiah. How infatuated must they be, who could withhold their assent from so plain a truth!]

2. That they in God's sight were the worst of murderers—

[They had not been able to fix any charge of guilt upon him; seeing that he had in all things approved himself "The Holy One and the Just:" yet had they insisted on his crucifixion, when Pilate, convinced of his innocence, had "determined to let him go:" yea, though he was "the Prince and Author of life," they had preferred "a murderer" and destroyer of life before him[f]. It was true, they had acted "ignorantly," blinded by their own prejudices and passions[g]: but still they were highly criminal in the sight of God; and must perish to all eternity, if they did not look to Him as their Saviour, whom they had crucified as a malefactor.

What a tremendous charge was this! To be accused of murder! of murdering the Prince of life, and "crucifying the Lord of glory!" But the charge was undeniable: and no hope of mercy remained to them, but by repenting of their guilt, and seeking to be cleansed from it in that very blood which they themselves had shed.]

But, as the miracle in this view is profitable chiefly to the Jews, we shall proceed to consider it,

II. As a ground of consolation to us—

Whilst we enter into all the feelings of the man that was restored, and are ready, as it were, to unite with him in all the expressions of his joy, we cannot but regard his miraculous restoration as calculated,

1. To confirm our faith—

[What cannot the Lord Jesus Christ effect? Whose soul can he not heal as easily, and as effectually, as he healed the

[e] ver. 11. [f] Ch. iii. 13—15. [g] ib. ver. 17.

the body of that poor man? "Is there any thing too hard for him?"———]

2. To encourage our hope—

Long had that man neglected the opportunities which the presence of Jesus at Jerusalem afforded him: for we cannot doubt, but that if he had applied to Jesus for relief, as myriads of others did, he would not have applied in vain. But now the mercy which he had never thought of seeking, was conferred upon him unsolicited[i]. What then will not Jesus do for them that *ask* him? What though we have slighted him all our days, and have never so much as thought of him till this present hour; will he spurn us from his foot-stool? Has he not said, that "*Whosoever* cometh to him, he will *in no wise* cast out?"———]

3. To inflame our love—

[We wonder not at the ecstacies of the restored man: we should rather wonder if he had not so expressed his joy and gratitude. But have not we also cause for joy? Does not every recovery from sickness, or every continuance of health, proceed from the same source? and is it not equally a ground of praise and thanksgiving? The circumstance of his cure being miraculous attracted more attention, it is true; but it added nothing to the value of the blessing bestowed: and if we were duly sensible of the benefits we enjoy, we should glorify our God even as he did.

But what if the Lord Jesus Christ has healed our *souls*? What if, by his life-giving word, he has quickened us from the dead? Should not *we* praise and magnify his name? Would not "even the stones cry out against us, if *we* held our peace?" See what the prophet foretold as the effect of the preached Gospel; "Then shall the lame man leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb shall sing[k]." See what David experienced as the result of this mercy to his own soul[l]; and know, that if the same *external* demonstrations of joy be not called for, the same *internal* frame of mind as the healed cripple possessed, should distinguish every one that professes to believe in Christ———"What shall I render to the Lord for all his benefits towards me?" is surely as proper to be asked on account of spiritual blessings, as of any mercies that can be vouchsafed to our poor perishing bodies.]

IMPROVEMENT—

1. Let us seek ourselves to be living witnesses for Christ—

[Little did this healed cripple imagine what weight he added

[i] Ch. iii. 6, 7.
[k] Isai. xxxv. 5, 6.
[l] Ps. ciii. 1. 3.

added to the Apostles' testimony, or how the sight of him confounded all the enemies of the Lord Jesus. And little does the consistent Christian imagine to what a degree he strengthens the hands of those who preach the Gospel. Truly we take courage when we can appeal to the effects of our ministry on the hearts and lives of our hearers. O let those who profess to have received the truth, shew, that the grace of Christ has wrought as effectually on them for the renovation of their souls, as it wrought on the cripple for the restoration of his limbs. Let every temper and disposition of our minds constrain our enemies to acknowledge, that "we have been with Jesus," and are blessed monuments of his transforming power[m] ——— Such an exhibition of his power and grace, will glorify him more than all the bodily cures he ever wrought[n].]

2. Let us never be afraid to vindicate his cause—

[It was but lately that Peter was intimidated by the voice of a servant-maid; but now he boldly confronted the whole Sanhedrim, and charged them all with the murder of their Messiah. Thus, if the whole world were to rise against us for our attachment to Christ, we should not give way to any unworthy fears, or be deterred from confessing him openly before men. We must indeed look well to our own spirit, and guard against the intemperate sallies of an angry or vindictive mind: the Apostolic rule should be rigidly adhered to, "Be ready always to give an answer to every one that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you *with meekness and fear*[o]:" but still we must never be ashamed of Christ, but "be faithful unto death, if ever we would receive from him a crown of life"— ——]

[m] See Isai. xliii. 11, 12. [n] 2 Thess. i. 11, 12. with Isai. lxii. 3.
[o] 1 Pet. iii. 14, 15, 16.

DCCCLVII.

SALVATION BY CHRIST ALONE.

Acts iv. 12. *Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved.*

FROM the account given us of the miracles wrought by our blessed Lord, we should be led, not only to acknowledge him as the true Messiah, but to consider what we ourselves may expect at his hands. His apostles, Peter and John, had healed a man who had been lame from his birth. The spectators, filled with

with astonishment, were ready to ascribe the honour of this miracle to them: but they told them by whom it had been effected, even by Jesus, whom they had rejected; but who, notwithstanding their contempt of him, was, and by this miracle had proved himself to be, "the head-stone of the corner[a]." They then directed the attention of their auditors to their own eternal interests, and assured them, that as Jesus alone restored the cripple to the use of his limbs, so Jesus alone could save them from everlasting perdition[b].

In discoursing upon the words before us, it will be proper to notice,

I. What is implied—

Nothing can be more clearly implied than *that there is salvation for us in Christ.* It may be thought that it is unnecessary to insist upon so plain and obvious a truth, more especially among those who call themselves Christians: but this truth is far from being universally known; and the grounds on which it stands are very little considered: and, if it were as well understood as we are apt to imagine, still there would be a necessity for dwelling frequently upon it, on account of its vast importance, and of "determining with St. Paul to know nothing among our people but Jesus Christ, and him crucified."

In confirmation of it, we shall appeal,

1. To the typical representations of Christ—

[There were a great variety of sacrifices under the Law, which typified the Lord Jesus Christ. The lamb that was offered every morning and evening, foreshewed "the Lamb of God that should take away the sin of the world:" and the scape-goat, which bore the iniquities of all Israel into an uninhabited wilderness, exhibited in yet more striking colours the removal of our guilt by a transfer of it to the head of Jesus. To dwell on all the ceremonies that were appointed on different occasions for the expiation of sin, is needless: suffice it to observe, that "the blood of bulls and of goats could not take away sin;" and that if those offerings had not respect to Christ, they

[a] ver. 11. [b] It is evident that the text refers, not to bodily healing, but to a salvation which the Apostles themselves, and all their hearers, stood in need of.

they were altogether unworthy, either to be prescribed to man, or to be accepted for him. But the efficacy of those sacrifices for the ends for which they were instituted, proves, beyond a doubt, the infinitely greater efficacy of that sacrifice which Christ in due time offered on the cross[c].]

2. To the positive declarations concerning him—

[Nothing can be conceived more clear and strong than the Scripture declarations of Christ's sufficiency to save. How forcibly has the prophet marked the extent[d], the fulness[e], and the freeness[f] of his salvation! He invites "all the ends of the earth," even persons defiled "with crimson sins," to accept all the benefits of the Gospel, "without money and without price." In the New Testament the same things are spoken with all the energy that language can afford. All, without exception, are exhorted to come to Christ[g], with all assurance that he will cleanse them from all sin[h], and bestow upon them freely all the blessings of grace and glory[i]. Is all this a mere mockery and delusion? It surely is so, if Christ be not "able to save to the uttermost all that come unto God by him[k]."]

3. To matter of fact—

[We can draw aside the veil of heaven, and point to some before the throne of God, who are such monuments of grace, as leave no doubt respecting the sufficiency of Christ to save any others whatsoever. Behold that man, a murderer; a murderer of no common stamp: he was not satisfied with shedding the blood of a few of his fellow-creatures, or of those who were deserving of death; but he "made the very streets of Jerusalem to run down with blood, and that with the blood of innocents." Moreover, this was but a small part of the guilt he had contracted; so various and so enormous were his crimes. Yet is he, even Manasseh, a chosen vessel, in whom God is, and for ever will be, glorified[l].

Seest thou that woman also? We know not the particulars of her conduct; but she was so vile and notorious a sinner, that it was a disgrace to notice her, yea our Lord's condescending to notice her was made a ground of doubting his divine mission: nevertheless she also, though once possessed by seven devils, is now in glory. She received, while yet upon earth, an assured testimony, from our Lord himself, that her sins, numerous as they were, were all forgiven[m]: and now is she singing the triumphs of redeeming love as loud as any in heaven.

We

[c] Heb. ix. 13,14. [d] Isai. xlv. 22. [e] Isai. i.18. [f] Isai. lv.1,2.
[g] Mat. xi. 28. John vi. 37. [h] 1 John i. 7. Acts xiii. 39.
[i] John iv. 10. & vii. 37, 38. [k] Heb. vii. 25.
[l] 2 Chron. xxxiii. 1—13. [m] Luke vii. 47,48.

We could easily refer to a multitude of others, whose enormities were beyond all measure great, who nevertheless were "washed, justified, and sanctified, in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God[n]." But enough has been said to put out of all question the blessed truth we are insisting on, namely, that Jesus is a Saviour, and a Great One, and able to deliver all who trust in him[o].]

Let us now turn our attention to,

II. What is expressed—

What solemn asseverations are these in the text! One would have supposed that the former of them would have been quite sufficient: but the Apostle thought no repetitions superfluous, nor any accumulation of words too strong, on such a subject as this. Indeed, it is of infinite importance to every one of us to know, that, as there is salvation for us in Christ, so "*there is no salvation in any other.*"

1. There is not—

[*In whom else can we find the requisites of a Saviour?* In whom can we find a sufficiency, either of merit to justify, or of power to renew, a sinner? If we should apply to the highest angel in heaven to give us of his merit, he would tell us that "he himself is only an unprofitable servant; for that he does no more than is his duty to do[p]." If we should intreat him to change our hearts, he would confess his utter inability to effect so great a work. Shall we then look to ourselves? We are full of sin. Our merit is found—where? not in heaven truly, but in the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone[q]. "Nor have we in ourselves a sufficiency even to think a good thought[r];" much less to renew ourselves after the Divine image. None but Jesus could atone for sin: none but Jesus could yield such an obedience to the law as should be capable of being imputed to others: none but Jesus can send down the Holy Spirit into the souls of men, or say to them, "My grace is sufficient for you[s]:" and therefore "there is no other name under heaven given among men whereby we can be saved."

If there were any other Saviour, the most eminent of God's servants would have had some intimation of it. Abraham, the friend of God, and the father of the Faithful, would probably have heard of him: but he knew of none other; for he sought acceptance through Christ alone, and was justified solely through

[n] 1 Cor. vi. 9—11. [o] Isai. xix. 20. [p] Luke xvii. 10.
[q] Rom. iii. 19. [r] 2 Cor. iii. 5. [s] 2 Cor. xii. 9.

through faith in him[t]. David too, the man after God's own heart, who was inspired to write so much respecting Christ, would probably have been acquainted with such an important fact in order to his own salvation; but he sought refuge in none but Christ; "Purge me with hyssop," says he, "and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow[u]." We might hope at least that some information of this kind would have been given to the apostle Paul, who was more fully instructed in the mind and will of God than any other person: yet he knew of no other name but that of Jesus; he renounced all hope "in his own righteousness that he might be found in Christ[x];" and "he determined to insist on nothing, in all his ministrations, but Jesus Christ, and him crucified[y]."

Whether therefore we consider the insufficiency of all the creatures to stand in the place of a Saviour to us, or the utter ignorance of all the Prophets and Apostles respecting the appointment of any creature to sustain that office, we may be sure that there is none other than the Person mentioned in the text, who is a man indeed, but is, at the same time, "God over all blessed for evermore."]

2. There cannot be—

[We presume not to be wise above what is written; or to say what God might have done if he had pleased: but we are fully warranted by the Scriptures to say, that, consistently with his honour, as the Moral Governor of the Universe, man could not have been saved without a Mediator: nor could any Mediator besides Jesus have been found to execute all that was necessary for our salvation. It was necessary that the justice of God should be satisfied for the violations of his law; that his holiness should be displayed in a marked abhorrence of sin; that his truth should be kept inviolate by the execution of his threatenings; and that his law should be honoured, as well by an obedience to its precepts, as by an enduring of its penalties. Now none but Jesus, who was God as well as man, could effect all these things, and therefore none but he could save us.

But there is yet another ground on which we may deny that any other could save us; namely, that if we were indebted to any other, either for righteousness or strength, we could not join in the songs of the Redeemed in heaven, but must separate from the heavenly choir[z], and ascribe to ourselves, or to some other, (inasmuch as we were indebted to ourselves or them,) the honour of our salvation. And how would this comport with the dignity of Jehovah, who has determined

[t] Rom. iv. 3—5. [u] Ps. li. 7. [x] Phil. iii. 9.
[y] 1 Cor. ii. 2. [z] Rev. vii. 9, 10.

determined "that no flesh should glory in his presence?" It is in vain to say that the glory would ultimately accrue to him: for if we be saved by, or for, any thing of our own, we may, and must, so far take the glory to ourselves[a]: and that would create discord in heaven, and be irreconcileable with the honour of the Divine Majesty.]

ADDRESS,

1. The careless—

[Wherefore are men so indifferent about their spiritual concerns? Is it that they are in no danger of perishing? If that were the case, why is so much said respecting salvation? and why are we cautioned so strongly against relying on any but Jesus Christ? Surely the very circumstance of Christ being sent down from heaven to die for us, is enough to alarm all our fears, and to convince us, that, if the salvation offered us could be procured by none but him, the danger of those who are not interested in him must be inexpressibly great. Let the careless then consider this; and flee for refuge to the hope that is set before them.]

2. The self-righteous—

[It is difficult to convince those who are looking to Christ *in part*, that they are really renouncing Christ *altogether*. But the Scriptures are so plain on this point, that there cannot be the smallest doubt respecting it. Salvation is "of faith, on purpose that it may be by grace[a]:" and if it be, whether in whole or in part, by our own works, it ceases to be of grace: it must be wholly of grace, or wholly of works[b]: it must exclude boasting altogether, or else admit it. But boasting must be excluded wholly[c]: and therefore all dependence whatsoever on our own works must be wholly and for ever renounced[d]. If we will not accept salvation on these terms, "Christ shall profit us nothing[e]."]

3. The desponding—

[The person healed by Peter and John was a very fit emblem of our state by nature and practice. "We are transgressors from the womb." But, desperate as in appearance our condition is, there is in Jesus a sufficiency of power and grace to make us whole: "his name, through faith in his name, shall give us a perfect soundness in the presence" of God and man[f]. Let none complain as though they were beyond the reach of mercy: for there is nothing impossible with Jesus: "with him there is mercy; with him is plenteous redemption; and he shall redeem Israel from all his sins[g]."]

[a] Rom. iv. 2.
[b] Rom. iv. 16.
[c] Rom. xi. 6.
[d] Rom. iii. 27.
[e] ib. ver. 8.
[f] Gal. v. 2, 4.
[g] Acts iii. 16. & iv. 10.
[h] Ps. cxxx. 7.

DCCCLVIII.

CONTEST BETWEEN PREJUDICE AND RELIGION.

Acts iv. 18—20. *And they called them, and commanded them not to speak at all, nor teach, in the name of Jesus. But Peter and John answered and said unto them, Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye: for we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.*

WHEN we see the enmity of the human heart against religion in these days, we are ready to impute some blame to the persons in whom that religion is displayed: it scarcely seems possible that a thing so excellent and beautiful as true religion should be an object of offence. But if we look back to the first establishment of Christianity, we find that the same aversion to it was then manifested by ungodly men, even though it was exhibited in the purest form, and was recommended by the most beneficent and stupendous miracles. In the history before us we see in a very striking view,

I. The force of prejudice—

Nothing can be conceived more unreasonable than the conduct of the Jewish Rulers towards the Apostles—

[They saw that a wonderful miracle had been wrought in confirmation of the doctrine which the Apostles preached[a]. Now what line of conduct would candour have prescribed? Would not any person under its influence have inquired about the doctrine, and compared it with the holy Scriptures? Would he not have examined carefully whether there was any real connexion between the miracle and the doctrine, and whether it was indeed a testimony from Heaven to the truth of Christianity? But behold how the Jewish Rulers acted on that occasion: they imprisoned the Apostles, tried them as criminals, disregarded all evidence in their favour, and, when they could not subvert the doctrine by argument, determined to suppress it by authority. They would have proceeded even to punish the preachers of it, if they had not been afraid of exciting discontent among the people: it was fear alone, and not equity, that prevented them from proceeding to yet severer measures. Their language, in effect, was

[a] ver. 16.

was this: 'A great miracle has been wrought indeed; but we will not have it mentioned. The doctrine which it was intended to confirm, appears to be from God; but we will not have it mentioned. The tendency of the doctrine, as far as we can judge from the miracle, is most salutary and beneficial; but we will not have it mentioned. The preachers of that doctrine profess to have received a commission from God himself; but we will not suffer them to execute it. They tell us that they open to men the only possible way of salvation; but we care not for the salvation of men, nor will we suffer any further attempts to promote it. They tell us, that it is at the peril of their own souls to decline the office assigned them; but what care we about their souls? they shall not execute their office, though they, and the whole world, should perish through their neglect. They tell us they must obey God; but we care not for God: they shall obey us, and not God; and if they do not regard us more than God, we will make them feel the weight of our heaviest displeasure.']

But unreasonable as this was, it shews, as in a glass, the precise manner in which the enemies of religion act at this day—

[The truth and excellence of Christianity are universally acknowledged, together with the obligation of all persons to obey it: yet no sooner does any one begin to obey it from the heart, than his friends and relatives endeavour to check his progress. In vain does he bring his sentiments to the test of Scripture; or urge the commands of God, and the awful judgments that will await him if unfaithful to his God: authority, as in the case before us, usurps the place of reason, and the will of man is put in opposition to the will of God. Unreasonable and impious as this is, it is the practice of parents, of masters, of all that are in authority, as far as the laws of the land, or the liberal spirit of the times, will admit——— and wherever religion most flourishes, there will this conduct most openly prevail [b].]

This however, for the most part, serves only to call forth,

II. The power of religion—

Beautifully was it exemplified on the occasion before us. Behold the Apostles;

1. How firm their conduct!—

[Lately had they all fled from their Master through fear of

[b] The terms "unreasonable and wicked" are still applicable to the generality of Unbelievers. 2 Thess. iii. 2.

of participating his troubles; but now they face the whole Sanhedrim, undaunted, undismayed. They knew that God was on their side; and therefore they "feared not what man could do unto them." This was, and ever will be, the effect of true religion: "the righteous are as bold as a lion:" and they who truly fear God, will cast off every other fear ——]

2. How forcible their appeal!—

[Their words were few, but unanswerable: for who can doubt whether *man* should rule, or *God?* Who can hesitate to determine the question in general, or how to act upon it in his own case? If man can do more for us than God, or prove a more formidable enemy than God, then may we prefer his favour before God's, and have a greater dread of his displeasure: but if man be so weak as to be crushed before the moth, then may we set at nought all his threatenings, and persist without fear in the service of our God. Indeed, if "we have seen, and heard" aright the blessed truths of the Gospel, we shall so feel their constraining influence, as to defy every effort of men or devils to counteract them.]

From this history then we may LEARN,

1. What is that doctrine we are concerned to hear—

[That is the true doctrine which proclaims salvation in "the name of Jesus." This it was which the Apostles preached; and which every Minister must preach. There is indeed "salvation in no other name;" and therefore all who desire salvation should embrace it with their whole hearts ———]

2. What is the treatment we must expect to meet with—

[If we either preach or profess the foregoing doctrine, we must expect the same scenes to be again realized as were exhibited in the Apostles' days. The enmity of the human heart against God is still the same as ever; and "they who are born after the flesh will still, as much as ever, persecute those who are born after the Spirit." "Let none then think it strange, if a fiery trial be sent to try them" ———]

3. What is that conduct we are bound to observe—

[Amidst all the injuries they sustained, the Apostles yielded not either to invective or complaint. But they were immoveable as rocks. Thus must we possess our souls in patience, and maintain our profession stedfast unto the end ———]

DCCCLIX.

THE BENEFIT OF UNITED PRAYER.

Acts iv. 31, 32. *And when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost; and they spake the word of God with boldness. And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and one soul: neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common.*

WHETHER, as has been said by many, the blood of the Martyrs has been the seed of the Church, we will not undertake to determine: but we have no doubt but that persecution has greatly tended to benefit the Church in all ages: it has produced a greater degree of separation between the Church and the world, and has thereby contributed very essentially to keep the saints from much contamination, which from a closer union with the world they would of necessity have contracted. It has also driven them to prayer, and brought them help from above: and further, it has united them more with each other, and stirred them up to a greater measure of zeal in strengthening and encouraging one another to fight the good fight of faith. The very unreasonableness of the persecutors has in many instances confirmed the saints in their determination to hold fast the profession of their faith without wavering[a]. Certainly if ever persecution was unreasonable, it was so in the instance before us. A most benevolent miracle had been wrought by the Apostles, who took occasion to proclaim the Lord Jesus Christ, in whose name they had wrought it, as the only Saviour of the world. To prevent the extension of their influence, the Rulers and Elders laid hands upon them, and imprisoned them, and with many threats commanded them to speak no more in the name of Jesus. But, behold the effect that was produced, both on the Apostles, and on the whole infant Church! the Apostles were no sooner liberated, than they "went to their own company and reported all that had been said unto them:

[a] Phil. i. 14.

them: and the consequence was, that they all betook themselves to prayer, and obtained help from God to prosecute their work with augmented energy and effect.

The points to which we would call your attention are,

I. The prayer they offered—

The particular point of view in which I wish this to be noticed is, as illustrating the holy superiority to all personal considerations, which the first Christians manifested in the midst of their deepest trials: they disdained to think of their own ease or interests, in comparison of God's honour, and the welfare of mankind. Yet so far were they from ostentation, that it is from what is omitted, rather than from any thing expressed, that we collect this exalted sentiment. In their prayer,

1. They view the hand of God himself in their trials—

[They address Jehovah as the Creator, and consequently the Governor, of all things both in heaven and earth. They bring to mind a prophecy of David, wherein it was foretold, that all the powers of the world would combine against the Lord and his Christ. They acknowledge that this prediction had been verified in the opposition which had been made to their Divine Master, by all, whether Jews or Gentiles. But in all this they see and confess the hand of God, ordering and directing all things in such a way that his own decrees and purposes should be all fulfilled[b].

Now all this may at first sight appear to have been irrelevant to their case: for, what reference had it at all to *their* sufferings? The connexion between the two must, as I have said, be found in that which is implied, rather than in that which is expressed. It is as though they had said, "Thou, Lord, hast foretold that thy Church and people shall be persecuted: thou hast shewn us, in the person of thy dear Son, what we are to expect at the hands of ungodly men: but, as in his case, so in ours, nothing can be done but what thou thyself hast ordained; nor can the bitterest foe upon earth exceed the commission which thou, for wise and gracious ends, hast given him. We therefore bow not our knees to deprecate any trials, which thou mayest see fit to send, but only to ask of thee such a measure of grace as shall enable us to sustain

[b] ver. 24—28.

sustain them, and such manifestations of thy power as shall carry conviction to the minds of our most obdurate enemies." Thus,]

2. They desire only that God may be glorified in them—

[They desire to rise to the occasion, and to have their energy increased in proportion to the difficulties which they have to contend with. Their own concerns are swallowed up, as it were, in the honour of their God. Happy attainment! How surely must those supplications prosper, which are dictated by such a principle, and proceed from such hallowed lips!]

The acceptableness of their prayer will be best seen in,

II. The answer they received—

"The house was shaken wherein they were assembled," in token that God had heard them, and that he was able to effect whatever should most conduce to their welfare. The Holy Ghost also was poured out upon them in a more abundant measure, not in his miraculous powers, but in his gracious and sanctifying influences; so that the effect was immediately visible in all. Observe the effect which was instantly produced;

1. On the Apostles—

[In them we see an immediate increase of zeal and constancy: "They spake the word of God with boldness; not only not intimidated by the threats of their enemies, but greatly strengthened to execute their office with energy and effect; insomuch, that "with greater power than ever, they gave witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus[c]." Mark the connexion of this with their persecution; and see how influential their trials were to render their ministry more extensively beneficial. Their own souls were quickened by the opposition which they met with: they were strengthened from on high in answer to their prayers: every word they uttered was attended with unction and with power: having within themselves the fruits and evidences of Christ's tender care, they could not but commend him to others as an able and all-sufficient Saviour, and urge all to seek the blessings which they themselves so richly enjoyed.

Now it is thus that Ministers are formed at the present day. If they have experienced but few trials, they possess, for the most

[c] ver. 33.

most part but little energy. It is only when, under difficult and trying circumstances, "their eyes have seen, their ears heard, and their hands handled the word of life," that they can speak of Christ with a feeling sense of his excellency. In speculative knowledge they may be complete; but in Divine unction they will be very defective; and their words, from the want of that unction, will never reach the heart. Hence God generally permits his most faithful servants to be severely tried, in order that from their own experience they may be able to instruct and comfort the people committed to their charge[d].

Next, see the effect produced,]

2. On the Church at large—

[As in the teachers there was an immediate increase of holy zeal, so was there in the hearers a visible augmentation of heavenly love. Instantly "the whole multitude of Believers became of one heart and one soul: neither said any of them that aught of the things that he possessed was his own; but they had all things common." They all considered themselves as one body: and exactly as the different members of a body, the eye, the ear, the hand, the foot, employ their respective powers, not with a view to any separate interest of their own, but for the collective benefit of the whole, so did these Christians, as soon as ever they were "filled with the Holy Ghost;" every one selling his houses or lands to form one common stock for the support and comfort of the whole.

Mark then here also the effect of persecution; how it united the Lord's people in one common bond, and advanced their mutual love to a height, which under other circumstances it would never have attained. Doubtless the particular act of casting all their property into one common stock is to be imitated only under circumstances similar to theirs: but the Spirit that dictated that act should abound in us, as much as in them: and it will abound in us in proportion as we possess the grace of Christ. The trials of the saints at this day being light, they know but little of sympathy, and make but little sacrifices for the good of others: but, if they were driven more to God by the sword of persecution, they would feel greater need of sympathy themselves, and would be ready to exercise it in a far larger measure towards others.]

From hence we may LEARN,

1. Where to go with our troubles—

[Whither should we go, but to that God, who has ordained them all, and promised to overrule them for our eternal good? The Apostles indeed went first "to their own company, and reported all that had been said to them:" but this

[d] 2 Cor. i. 3—6.

this was for the purpose of comforting and encouraging *them*, and not with a view to obtain comfort or encouragement themselves; for *that* they betook themselves to prayer, having engaged all the Church to unite with them in their supplications. The benefit of this measure to all who engaged in it, you have already heard: whilst they were in the very act of pouring out their souls before God, an answer was given from on high; and every soul was filled with grace and peace. And say, Brethren, has it never been so with you? Look back to seasons of affliction, when you could find no refuge but in God: have they not proved seasons of peculiar refreshment to your souls? Have you not received "strength according to your day," so as not only to endure your tribulations, but to glory in them?———Bear in remembrance then that direction which God himself has given you; "Call upon me in the time of trouble, and I will hear thee, and thou shalt glorify me." Yes, "cast your burthen on the Lord; and he will sustain you."]

2. How to recommend our principles—

[It is to the shame of Christianity that there are so many parties amongst us, and that there is so little love exercised by them towards each other. Compare the Church at this time with the Church of Christ in that age: alas! at what a low ebb is vital godliness amongst the professors of the present day! Instead of uniting against the common enemy, they do little but dispute with each other: and, instead of every one denying himself for the good of the whole, they are all immersed in selfishness, and are intent only on their own personal ease or interest. But so did not the saints of old: they constrained their very enemies to say, "Behold, how these Christians love one another!" Oh that such seasons might speedily return, and that our eyes might witness them in this place! But it is to be feared that we shall never learn this lesson, till we are taught it in the school of affliction. Yet how much better were it to learn it from the example of the primitive saints, and especially from the example of "the Lord Jesus Christ, who, though he was rich, for our sakes became poor, that we through his poverty might be rich!" Beloved Brethren, set these examples before you, and implore grace from God, that you may be able to walk in these blessed paths. Then will you "put to silence the ignorance of foolish men," and constrain your very enemies to "acknowledge, that God is with you of a truth."]

DCCCLX.

ANANIAS AND SAPPHIRA.

Acts v. 3—5. *But Peter said, Ananias, Why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost, and to keep back part of the price of the land? While it remained, was it not thine own? and after it was sold, was it not in thine own power? Why hast thou conceived this thing in thine heart? Thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God. And Ananias, hearing these words, fell down, and gave up the ghost: and great fear came on all them that heard these words.*

IN contemplating the dispensations of Providence, there are some which, on a superficial view, we should be ready to accuse of severity; but, on a closer inspection of them, we shall find them to be replete with mercy. At the first establishment of the Jewish religion, Nadab and Abihu were slain for offering incense with strange fire; as Corah also and his company were for their rebellion against Moses. But such judgments, though terrible to the individuals concerned, had a direct tendency to benefit the nation at large; inasmuch as they proclaimed to all, that "God was greatly to be feared," and "to be had in reverence by all them that are round about him." Thus, at the first establishment of the Christian Church, Ananias and Sapphira were struck dead for endeavouring to impose on the Apostles, and for professing to give the whole produce of their estate to the Church, whilst they held back a part of it for their own use. In our text, Peter shews him the enormity of his offence, and inflicts upon him the judgment which he richly merited. To make a suitable improvement of this history, we shall notice,

I. The representation here given of the Holy Ghost—

The falsehood uttered by Ananias and his wife seems to have been designed only to impose on the Apostles and the Church: but St. Peter speaks of it as "a tempting of the Spirit of the Lord[a]," and "a lying to the Holy Ghost," or, in other words, "a lying

[a] ver. 9.

lying unto God." Now from these expressions we see who the Holy Ghost is:

1. He is a distinct person—

[It would be absurd to imagine that the Holy Ghost is a mere quality; for on such a supposition the language of the Apostle would have no meaning at all. If he is tempted and deceived, he must be a person: and accordingly we find him spoken of continually as *one* indeed with the Father and the Son, but yet as personally distinct from them.

He *possesses the attributes* of a person;—understanding [b], will [c], and, if not affections, yet a susceptibility of impression suited to the manner in which he is treated by us [d]. He *sustains the offices* of a person, being a Comforter [e], an Intercessor [f], a Teacher [g], a Witness [h]. He also *performs the acts* of a person; commanding [i], forbidding [k], judging [l]. And, that we may not confound him with either of the other persons of the Godhead, he is spoken of as distinct from both, and as sent *from* the Father *by* the Son for specific ends and purposes, which, according to the plan proposed between the Sacred Three, were to be accomplished by him alone [m].]

2. He is the true God—

[This also is declared with no less clearness than the former: for, He is called by *the incommunicable name*, Jehovah [n]. He has all *the perfections* of the Deity; eternity [o], omnipresence [p], omniscience [q]. He does *the works* that are proper to God alone: he formed the body of Jesus in the Virgin's womb [r]; qualified him for the office he was to sustain [s]; is the author of every good work in us [t]; and inspired from the very beginning all the Prophets and Apostles, that they might communicate to us with infallible certainty the mind and will of God [u]. He receives also *the worship* that is due to God only [x], and is joined with the Father and the Son as the glorious Being to whom we are consecrated in our baptism [y], and as equally with them the source of all spiritual blessings [z].

From this view of the Holy Ghost we see with what propriety the Apostle spoke of him as "*God*;" nor do we hesitate

[b] 1 Cor. ii. 11. [c] 1 Cor. xii. 11. [d] Isai. lxiii. 10. Eph. iv. 30.
[e] John xiv. 16, 17. [f] Rom. viii. 26, 27. [g] John xiv. 26.
[h] Rom. viii. 16. [i] Acts xiii. 2—4. [k] Acts xvi. 6, 7.
[l] Acts xv. 28. [m] John xv. 26.
[n] Isai. vi. 8—10. with Acts xxviii. 25. [o] Heb. ix. 14.
[p] Ps. cxxxix. 7. [q] 1 Cor. ii. 10. [r] Luke i. 35.
[s] Isai. lxi. 1. [t] Gal. v. 22. [u] 1 Pet. i. 11. & 2 Pet. i. 21.
[x] 2 Thess. iii. 5. Rev. i. 4. [y] Matt. xxviii. 19.
[z] 2 Cor. xiii. 14.

tate for a moment to proclaim him, "The Most High God[a]".]

The more exalted our conceptions of the Holy Spirit are, the more shall we see,

II. The importance of approving ourselves to him in all things—

It is certain we may commit the same sin as Ananias and Sapphira did—

[Let us get a precise idea of what their sin was. Many in the Church sold their possessions, and laid the whole produce of them at the Apostles' feet, to make a fund for the support of the Church at large[b]. Barnabas in particular is mentioned as having done this[c]. Doubtless this generosity gained them high credit in the infant Church: and Ananias and Sapphira determined to come in for a share of this honourable distinction. They sold their estate therefore; but not being able to trust God for their future support, or not choosing to relinquish all their temporal comforts, they agreed to keep back a part of the price, and to present only a certain portion of it to the Apostles. Wishing however to appear as eminent as others, they professed to give the whole produce; thus endeavouring to obtain the full credit of others, without making their sacrifice. This was their sin; a mixture of ostentation, of covetousness, of unbelief; a seeking of credit which they did not deserve, and a pretending to virtue which they did not possess.

This the Apostle calls "a lying unto," and "a tempting of, the Holy Spirit:" for it was an attempt to deceive the Apostles, whom the Holy Ghost had invested with miraculous gifts and powers; and it tempted the Holy Spirit to shew whether he were an omniscient, holy, and just Being, or not.

Hence then it appears that all *allowed* hypocrisy is of the very nature of their sin. The short-comings and defects of a *sincere* Christian, though contrary to his profession, cannot properly be classed with their sin; but every wilful deviation from duty, especially if deliberate and persevered in, is in fact a lying unto God.

What then must be said of those who harbour any secret lust ———or make any reserve whatever in their obedience to God? ———or do even what is right in itself from any corrupt motive? ——— A desire of man's applause will carry some to great apparent heights of virtue; it will urge them to laborious exertions, and reconcile them to painful sacrifices:

[a] Compare Heb. iii. 7—9. with Ps. lxxviii. 56.
[b] Ch. iv. 34, 35. [c] ib. ver. 36, 37.

sacrifices: but God, who seeth the heart, will abhor all such offerings, and account them no better than that which Ananias and Sapphira presented to him.]

And it is certain also, that if we do, God will both detect and punish it—

[God not unfrequently exposes hypocrites to shame in this world; and suffers their hidden corruption to be brought to light. How often does it happen, that a person, who on the whole has maintained externally a creditable profession, is instigated by his predominant passion, whether of lust or covetousness, to an act that blasts his character for ever! But, if no such exposure take place in this world, the mask will be taken off as soon as we come into the presence of our God. Alas! what will be our sensations, and the sensations of many around us, when we are interrogated by our Judge in relation to things from which perhaps we gained the greatest credit? What must have been the surprise of Ananias and Sapphira, and of all their friends too, when the act which appeared so excellent, was proved so faulty, and was visited with so awful a judgment! Let us endeavour to realize that scene, and we shall have some faint idea of the hypocrite's feelings at the day of judgment. We may easily deceive men; but "God will not be mocked:" to him every secret thought is open; and in the last day "he will make manifest all the counsels of our hearts[d]." Then, if not before, "our sin shall find us out;" and "the Holy Ghost himself," whom we have tempted and deceived, shall "be a witness" against us to our everlasting confusion[e].]

The only IMPROVEMENT we would make of this *subject*, is that which the Church itself made of the *event*—

[We read that "great fear came on all them that heard these things." O that such a fear may come on all who hear me this day!

Tell me, O ye who live in the allowed indulgence of open and known sins; have *ye* no cause for fear? If this liberal act of Ananias was so abhorred of God, because of the insincerity that attended it, and brought such a tremendous judgment upon him, do you think that your iniquities shall pass unpunished? ———

And, ye who profess religion, have not ye cause for fear also, lest your services at last should be found to have been only splendid sins? Remember that "God requireth truth in the inward parts." If you had all the armour of God upon you, and it were not fastened on with the girdle of truth, it would

[d] 1 Cor. iv. 5. Ps. xliv. 21. [e] Heb. x. 15. Mal. iii. 5.

would leave you exposed to all the arrows of the Almighty [f]. Those who are "hypocrites in heart heap up wrath [g];" and "fearfulness will at last surprise them [h]." Behold then, as our Lord said even to the Apostles, so say I to you, "Beware of hypocrisy [i]:" beware lest ye profess more than ye design to practise [k]. Seek to have "your hearts right with God." Intreat him to give you "the wisdom that is from above, which is without partiality, and without hypocrisy." Then will the Spirit of God abide with you [l]; then will the blood of Christ also cleanse you from the defilement which cleaves to your very best actions [m]; and God the Father will delight in you to all eternity [n].]

[f] Eph. vi. 14. [g] Job xxxvi. 13. [h] Isai. xxxiii. 14.
[i] Luke xii. 1. [k] Jer. xlii. 20, 21. [l] 1 Cor. iii. 16, 17.
[m] 1 John i. 7. [n] Prov. xi. 20.

DCCCLXI.

THE ENDS OF CHRIST'S EXALTATION.

Acts v. 30—32. *The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom ye slew and hanged on a tree. Him hath God exalted with his right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins. And we are his witnesses of these things: and so is also the Holy Ghost, whom God hath given to them that obey him.*

AMONG the various things which have weight and influence in forming decision of character, there is nothing so powerful as religion. The fear of God operates to the dissipating of all other fear; and the love of God subjugates or refines all creature attachments. Persons actuated by any other principle, will bend to circumstances: but religion will give us an uniform direction, like that of the needle to the pole. We see this very strongly illustrated by the conduct of Peter and the other Apostles. We acknowledge that they were not destitute of a religious principle during their Master's life: but it was not till the day of Pentecost that they fully understood the nature of Christianity, or were completely subjected to its dominion. From that time, the most timid of them were emboldened to confess Him whom they had just before forsaken and denied. They had just been imprisoned for bearing their testimony

testimony to his office and character; yet, when threatened with still heavier vengeance, they undauntedly persevered; charging the very Rulers themselves with the guilt of murdering the Lord of Glory, and affirming that the very person whom they had crucified as a malefactor was exalted to be the Saviour of the world.

In considering this address of theirs to the Jewish Council, it will be proper to notice,

I. The testimonies borne to the exaltation of Jesus—

In the text, two are referred to;

1. That of the Apostles—

[They declare, "We are witnesses of these things." Now they certainly were *competent* witnesses, both of the resurrection and the ascension of our blessed Lord: for, though they had not actually seen him rise, they had seen him frequently after he had risen, and had even eaten and drunk with him, and beheld him in the very act of ascending into heaven. The very incredulity which they manifested in relation to these things, is a strong confirmation that they did not hastily credit the report of others, or even their own senses, till they were overpowered with such evidence as was absolutely irresistible[a]. They were also as *unexceptionable* witnesses as could possibly exist: for, being poor illiterate fishermen, they could not frame an imposture that should deceive the whole world; nor had they the smallest inducement to attempt it, since they could expect nothing but contempt and persecution in this world, and eternal misery in the world to come. They gave their testimony too *in the most unexceptionable manner*. If they had been impostors, they would have gone to a distance, where their conspiracy should not so easily have been detected; or, at least, have delayed till the present ferment had subsided; and have practised their imposition first on the weak and credulous. But, instead of this, they bore their testimony *without any loss of time*, and *in Jerusalem* too, where every falsehood could be so easily detected, and *before all the Jewish Rulers*, who were most of all interested in disproving the facts attested.

As for the testimony by which the Jewish Rulers endeavoured to invalidate the assertions of the Apostles, it still further established the very point which it was intended to disprove[b]. For, if the guard slept, how could they tell what was done in their sleep? and why were they not punished? Why

[a] Mark xvi. 14. Luke xxiv. 39—43. John xx. 25—29.
[b] Matt. xxviii. 11—15.

Why too did the Rulers engage to screen them from punishment, when their disappointment and rage would rather have called forth their most vindictive efforts?]

2. That of the Holy Ghost himself—

[The Lord Jesus had repeatedly declared, that, after his ascension to heaven, he would send the Holy Ghost to testify of him. On the accomplishment of this promise depended the validity of his pretensions. At the appointed time he fulfilled his word, and sent down the Holy Ghost in a visible manner on his Disciples. In this first instance then the Holy Ghost testified, that Jesus was indeed risen, and that he had ascended to the right hand of God. By the influence of the Holy Ghost, the Apostles were enabled to preach the Gospel in a great diversity of languages which they had never learned. They wrought also many and stupendous miracles in confirmation of their word. They were empowered also, by the imposition of their hands, to communicate the Holy Ghost to others. By all these things the Holy Ghost bore yet further testimony to the Messiahship of Jesus. By his communications also, of light, and peace, and holiness, he testified in the hearts of all who received the Apostles' word: and to this hour does he continue to testify unto thousands in the same way.

Can we conceive that God the Father would have interposed in this astonishing manner to aid an imposture? Assuredly the facts so attested must be true; and Jesus is exalted for the ends and purposes which are specified in the text.]

Let us then proceed to examine,

II. The ends and purposes for which he is exalted—

The resurrection and ascension of Jesus were necessary,

1. For his own honour—

[Great had been his humiliation, for the sake of honouring his Father, and of saving man: and now a suitable reward was to be bestowed upon him. He had covenanted with the Father, that, "when he should have made his soul an offering for sin," he should see his kingdom established in the world[c]. Having therefore performed his part, he was exalted by the right hand of God, and constituted "a Prince and a Saviour" to the whole world.

We may conceive on this occasion that the Father welcomed his return in such expressions as these; "Come, my Son, my well-beloved, in whom my soul is well pleased:" "thou hast glorified me on earth, thou hast finished the work

[c] Isai. liii. 10—12.

work which I gave thee to do:" now "sit thou on my right hand, till I make all thine enemies thy footstool." Thou hast been "crucified" apparently "through weakness;" and thine enemies enjoy a momentary triumph: but now "gird thy sword upon thy thigh, O thou Most Mighty; ride on in the cause of meekness and truth and righteousness; and let thy right hand teach thee terrible things." "I have sworn that to Thee every knee shall bow, and every tongue shall swear:" now therefore "thine enemies shall lick the dust:" and "thou shalt have the utmost ends of the earth for thy possession." "Thou hast humbled thyself even to the death of the cross; and therefore I will now exalt thee above all the principalities and powers," both of heaven and hell.[d]]

2. For his people's good—

[The people of God cannot, of themselves, obtain forgiveness of sins, or even repent of them, as they ought. But Jesus is "exalted to give them both repentance and forgiveness of sins." He has all power committed to him for that very purpose. There is a fulness treasured up in him; a fulness of merit, to justify the guilty; a fulness of grace, to sanctify the polluted; and all are encouraged to receive out of his fulness whatsoever they stand in need of. By his exaltation to the right hand of God, they are assured that he is accepted as their Substitute and Surety; that he will also be their "Advocate with the Father;" and that "he is able to save to the uttermost all that come unto God by him."]

We shall CONCLUDE with,

1. A word of encouragement to the weak—

[Fear not, as if you were out of the reach of mercy. The bestowing of mercy is committed to your best friend: he is exalted on purpose that he may bestow it: and if he were regardless of your suit, he would forget the very ends of his own exaltation. As for your guilt being unpardonable, consider only to whom salvation was offered by the Apostle in our text; even to them who had crucified the Lord, and imprisoned all the Apostles, and were now seeking to slay them, as they had already slain their Divine Master. Think of this, and there will be no room for despondency. If you reply, "True; but I can't repent;" we answer, "He is exalted to give repentance, as well as forgiveness;" and he is both able and willing to bestow them both. And the Apostles were expressly commanded to preach this blessed truth to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem, where such joyful tidings could least of all have been expected to be heard.]

2. A word

[d] These expressions are mostly uttered in Scripture, in a way of address from the Father to the Son.

2. A word of caution to the presumptuous—

[Let none abuse the Gospel, or think that Christ will ever profit them, if they continue in their sins. What is united in Christ's offices, must be united in our experience. If he give us remission, he will give us repentance also: if he be a Saviour to us, he must also be our Prince. What therefore God has joined together, let no man put asunder.]

DCCCLXII.

THE DEATH OF STEPHEN.

Acts vii. 59, 60. *And they stoned Stephen, calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. And when he had said this, he fell asleep.*

OF all histories, that of the Christian Church is the most interesting, and particularly that part of it which is recorded by the Inspired Writers. There we behold every thing portrayed with perfect fidelity; nothing is concealed, nothing exaggerated. The writers appear unconcerned about any thing but the truth itself; from which they leave all persons to draw their own conclusions. Large sums of money arising from the sale of different estates were lodged in the hands of the Apostles for the use of the Church; and in a very little time they began to be suspected of partiality to the natives of Judea, in preference to the Jews of foreign extraction. This they relate with perfect indifference, together with the method adopted by them to prevent the distraction arising from too great a multiplicity of concerns. Then having told us who were chosen by the Church to superintend their temporal concerns, they proceed to detail the history of one whose piety was most distinguished, and whose end was most glorious; and who, as being the first martyr in the Christian Church, was to be an example for the imitation of Christians in all future ages.

In relation to this history of Stephen, there are two things which we propose to notice;

I. The occasion of his death—

Being endowed with very eminent gifts, he maintained

tained a controversy with the most learned Jews of different countries; and so confounded them with his arguments, that they had no alternative, but to acknowledge their errors, or to silence him by force. To this latter method they had recourse: they seized him, and brought him before the Council, and accused him of blasphemy, that he might be put to death. In the chapter before us is contained his defence; which so irritated and inflamed them, that it stirred them up in a violent and tumultuous manner to take away his life. Let us consider distinctly its most prominent parts:

1. The statement—

[A superficial reader would scarcely see the scope and bearing of Stephen's argument: but the argument will be found plain and clear, if only we bear in mind what the accusation was. He was accused of blasphemy against Moses, and against the Temple, and the Law, because he had declared that the Lord Jesus would execute his judgments on the whole nation. For these declarations he had abundant warrant, from the prophecies contained in the Jewish Scriptures[a]——— nor can we doubt but that, if he had been permitted to proceed in his argument without interruption, he would have proved every part of his assertions in the most convincing manner. But, as soon as they discerned the precise scope of his argument, they shewed such impatience as constrained him to break off abruptly in the midst of it. He had shewn them, that Abraham was chosen of God whilst he was yet an idolater in an idolatrous land; that he and his posterity served and enjoyed God, long before the law was given by Moses; that Moses himself was rejected by the people whom he was sent to deliver; that he also had directed the people to look for another Prophet who should arise after him, and whom they must obey at the peril of their souls. He then shewed, that whilst the Temple was yet in all its glory, and its services were performed with the strictest regularity, God had spoken of the Temple in the most disparaging terms, as unsuitable to the majesty of Him who filled heaven and earth[b].

Here the drift of his discourse began to appear: the people saw that their Temple and its services were not necessary to the enjoyment of God's favour, and that they could afford no security to those who were disobedient to his word. Here therefore

[a] For the destruction of Jerusalem, see Jer. vii. 4, 7—14. & xxvi. 6—9, 12, 18. And for the change of "the customs," i. e. of the law itself, see Isai. lxv. 16. & lxvi. 19—21. [b] Isai. lxvi. 1, 2.

therefore they manifested their wrathful indignation: which obliged him to drop the prosecution of his argument, and to proceed to]

2. The application of it to their hearts and consciences—

[Nothing could be more temperate or cautious than the foregoing discourse. But when Stephen saw the inveteracy of their prejudices, he changed his voice, and addressed them with an energy and fidelity that became a servant of the living God. They had indeed in their flesh the seal of God's covenant; but they were "uncircumcised in heart and ears," and "resisted the Holy Ghost," who both by his word and influences strove to bring them to a better mind. They professed to venerate the Prophets; but they were following the steps of their forefathers, who had uniformly persecuted those whom God had sent to instruct and warn them: yea, they had been the betrayers and murderers of their Messiah himself: and though they pretended a great regard for the law, and professed to be actuated by a zeal for its honour, they had never been truly observant of its commands.

Such is the character of persecutors in general: they are full of pride and wrath, and are so blinded by prejudice as to be incapable of seeing the wickedness of their own hateful dispositions. Their zeal for God's honour is a mere pretence, a cover, and a plea for their own malignity. Look at them in every age, they all are actuated by the same spirit, and all tread in the same paths. Doubtless in addressing them we should first try what argument and persuasion will do; and we should exercise much patience towards them: but when we find that they shut their ears and harden their hearts against conviction, we should not be afraid to exhibit their conduct in its true light, or to set before them the judgments which they are bringing on their own souls.]

3. The confirmation of it by an actual vision of Christ himself—

[They were sufficiently irritated by this reproof; "they were cut to the heart," even *as if they had been sawn asunder*[c]; and "they gnashed upon him with their teeth." But the preacher, "being filled with the Holy Ghost, looked up stedfastly to heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God:" and, being favoured with this vision, he declared to his persecutors what he saw. One might have hoped that this at least would have made them pause; but it inflamed even unto madness: "They cried out with a loud voice, and stopped their ears, and run upon him with one accord, and cast him out of the city, and stoned him."

Here we see how inveterate is that prejudice which instigates

[c] διεπρίοντο.

instigates men to oppose religion: nothing can satisfy them; nothing can convince them: and the stronger the evidence adduced for their conviction, the fiercer will be their rage against their monitors and reprovers.

We have here also a striking instance of that hypocrisy which usually characterizes the persecutors of religion. They would not stone him in the city, because God had ordered that blasphemers should be put out of the camp before they were stoned[d]: and they took care that the hands of the witnesses should be first upon him[e]: but they had not hesitated to suborn false witnesses against him; nor did they scruple to put to death a man whom they could not convict of any crime. Thus the murderers of our Lord would not venture to put into the treasury the money which Judas had returned, though they had been forward enough to give it him as the price for his Master's blood: thus also it is in every age; the haters of God will stop at nothing to accomplish their wicked purposes; but they will "strain out a gnat at the very time that they are swallowing a camel."

Here also we see how God supports his faithful servants. If he leave them in the hands of their enemies as it respects the body, he will supply them with consolations to support the soul. Stephen knew before that Jesus *was* at the right hand of God: but when he *saw him there*, and saw him "*standing*" there, ready to succour his oppressed servant, and to avenge his cause, his mind was fortified, and death was divested of all its terrors.]

Such was the occasion of Stephen's death. We now proceed to notice,

II. The manner of it—

Violent as were the proceedings of his enemies, he was all composure. Behold,

1. His faith—

[He "knew in whom he had believed," and that "HE was able to save him to the uttermost." He knew that the soul, when liberated from the body, would continue to exist; and that its felicity consisted in communion with Christ. To Christ therefore the blessed martyr now addressed himself in prayer, and committed his soul into the Saviour's hands. This was as solemn an act of worship as he could offer; for it was precisely the same as that which Christ himself had offered to his Father with his dying breath, when he said "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit." Yet this act of worship was paid by Stephen to Christ, at the very time when he beheld the Father's glory, and at the very time that he was full of the Holy Ghost. How evident is it from hence that Christ is

[d] Lev. xxiv. 14—16, 23. See also 1 Kin. xxi. 13. [e] Deut. xvii. 6, 7.

is God equal with the Father! and how evident that a prospect of dwelling for ever in *his* presence will disarm death of its sting, and support the soul under the most cruel sufferings!

This is the faith which we should cultivate: this view of Jesus as an almighty and all-sufficient Saviour will quicken us to every duty, and strengthen us for every trial, and make us victorious over every enemy. Though appointed as sheep for the slaughter, we shall be more than conquerors through Him that loved us."]

2. His love—

[In exact conformity to his Saviour's example, he died praying for his murderers; "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge!" This shews how far he was from feeling any thing of resentment in the rebuke which he had before given them: and it shews that the utmost fidelity to the souls of men will consist with the most fervent love towards them. Well had this holy man learned the precepts of his Lord. O that we also might obtain the same grace to "bless them that curse us, and to pray for them that despitefully use us and persecute us!" This is the test of real love. To love them that love us, is nothing: the vilest publicans will do that: but to love our enemies, to feel for them rather than for ourselves, to be tenderly concerned for them at the very moment that they are venting their utmost rage against us, and to be more anxious for the welfare of their souls than for the preservation of our own lives, *this* is Christian love; this is that love which is the fruit of the Spirit, the image of God, and the earnest of heaven in the soul. Possessed of such a spirit, we need not fear what man can do unto us; for even the most violent death will be to us only as reclining on a bed to sleep; Stephen, with this grace in his heart, and this prayer upon his lips, "fell asleep."]

Here then let the world JUDGE;

1. Whether there be not an excellency in true religion?

[We acknowledge that many Heathens have shewn a wonderful composure in death, yea, and a joyous exultation in it also: but then they have been borne up by pride and vanity, and the hope of man's applause: no instance ever occurred of such an end as Stephen's, except among the worshippers of Jehovah. Nothing but Divine grace can give such meekness and fortitude, such faith and love, such tranquillity and joy, as Stephen manifested in that trying hour. On the other hand, Divine grace will produce these things wherever it reigns in the soul: in proportion to the measure of any man's grace will be his proficiency in these virtues. Compare then the spiritual

spiritual man with one who is yet under the influence of his corrupt nature; compare, for instance, the mind of Paul after his conversion to the faith of Christ, with its state whilst he was keeping the raiment of Stephen's murderers. Such a comparison would in one instant convince us, that there is a wonderful efficacy in the Gospel of Christ, and that a person under its full influence is as superior to others as the solar light is to the twinkling of the obscurest star.]

2. Whether the true Christian be not the happiest man?

[On the one side are proud and persecuting zealots; on the other are the meek followers of a crucified Saviour. Look at the frame of their minds; the one all rage and violence; the other all sweetness and composure. Let any man, with the Bible in his hand, survey that scene which we have just contemplated; and say, Whether he would not infinitely prefer the state of Stephen with all his sufferings, to that of his persecutors satiated with his blood? A man through cowardice may draw back from sufferings; but no man can doubt which of these parties was in the more enviable state: and how much less could he doubt it if he were to survey them in their present state; the one exulting in his Saviour's bosom, and the other receiving the just recompence of their sins? O let all, whether oppressors or oppressed, contemplate this, and then make their election, "Whose they will be, and whom they will serve."]

DCCCCIII.

PHILIP PREACHES CHRIST IN SAMARIA.

Acts viii. 5—8. *Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them. And the people with one accord gave heed unto those things which Philip spake, hearing, and seeing the miracles which he did. For unclean spirits, crying with a loud voice, came out of many that were possessed with them: and many taken with palsies, and that were lame, were healed. And there was great joy in that city.*

NO sooner was the Gospel preached with success, than Satan stirred up persecution against it; determined, if possible, to crush and annihilate the infant Church. But what he designed for the destruction of Christianity, God overruled for its speedier propagation, and its firmer establishment. The persecution which commenced with the death of Stephen was so bitter,

bitter, that the new converts were constrained to flee from Jerusalem, in order to escape its violence; the Apostles alone daring to brave the storm. But the Christians who fled to all the surrounding country, carried the Gospel along with them, and published it in every place: and the very circumstance of their being persecuted on account of it, rendered them more earnest in spreading the knowledge of it, and gave it a deeper interest among the people to whom they spake. Philip, who, like Stephen, was one of the seven deacons, fled with the rest, and went down to Samaria; and there was made a happy instrument of diffusing widely the knowledge of his Lord and Saviour.

From the account given of him in our text, we are led to notice,

I. The subject of his discourses—

The "preaching of Christ" is a term commonly used in Scripture for the publishing of the Gospel in all its parts: it is said of the Apostles, that "daily, in the Temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach, and preach Jesus Christ." Respecting Philip's discourses we are more fully informed; for "he preached the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ[a]." He shewed them,

1. Concerning the kingdom of God—

[This kingdom had been distinctly spoken of by the Prophets, as to be established in due time: and the Gentiles, as well as Jews, expected the erection of it about that time. The person to whom the throne of David belonged was now come; and, though rejected and crucified by his own subjects, he had set up a kingdom which should never be moved. His empire indeed was not like those of the world, but was altogether spiritual; it was established in the hearts of men, and was founded in righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost. Into this kingdom all are called; and all who would be saved must become the subjects of it, giving up themselves to Christ, as their only Governor and Redeemer.

This is the instruction which Ministers in every age must give to those whom they address in the name of Christ. None can properly be called the *natural* subjects of this kingdom: for all by nature are subjects of Satan's kingdom, and must be

[a] ver. 12.

be conquered by Divine grace, before they will submit to the government of Christ: as the Apostle expresses it, They are "delivered from the power of darkness, and translated into the kingdom of God's dear Son." This then is the message, which, as God's Ambassadors, we declare to you in his name: you must all throw down the weapons of your rebellion, and submit yourselves to Christ, to be saved wholly by his grace, and to be governed wholly by his laws ———]

2. Concerning the name of Jesus Christ—

[To the Apostles this name was more precious than words can possibly express: it was the foundation of all their hopes, and the source of all their joys. They had seen the efficacy of this name to produce the most astonishing effects; and they knew that "there was no other name given under heaven whereby men could be saved." Hence they strove to commend the Lord Jesus to the whole world, proclaiming him in all his offices, and magnifying him as the Saviour of a ruined world ———And what other theme is there so delightful to his Ministers in all ages? To honour him, and exalt him, and commend him to the world, is the great office of a Minister; and then is his ministry most successful, when he can be instrumental to the making HIM known and loved and honoured by the world at large———]

3. That Christ had now established his kingdom upon earth—

[It was well known, from the Prophetic writings, that the Messiah was to come, and to erect an universal empire in the world. This Messiah was come; and Jesus had proved, by the most unquestionable evidence, that he was the person so long foretold, and so earnestly desired[b]. These proofs Philip doubtless set before them———and declared to them the nature of that kingdom which was now established: it was not indeed such as the carnal Jews had expected, and such as existed among the Heathen; it was a spiritual kingdom erected in the hearts of men, and consisting "in righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost"———]

4. That of this they might all become the happy subjects—

[Satan had usurped dominion over mankind, and had held his vassals in the sorest bondage: but his power was broken: Christ had "triumphed over him upon the cross, and had spoiled all the principalities and powers" of hell. By making atonement for sin, Christ had reconciled men to their offended God, and had obtained for them the privilege of becoming his sons. This privilege Philip held forth to them as of inestimable

[b] Hag. ii. 7.

inestimable value, and as to be secured simply by faith in the Lord Jesus. In urging this point, no doubt he opened fully the riches of grace and love that are in Christ Jesus; and intreated all the people to embrace his proffered salvation. He would expatiate largely on the privileges which all the subjects of this kingdom should enjoy; their security from all evil, their possession of all good: in a word, he magnified the Lord Jesus Christ among them, as the only, and all-sufficient Saviour of a ruined world.]

This testimony he confirmed by miracles, which operated strongly to the conviction of their minds; as we shall see, whilst we consider,

II. The effect of his ministrations—

It is supposed by many, that the Gospel is productive only of melancholy: but far different was its fruit in Samaria; for "there was great joy," it is said, "in that city." But whence did their joy proceed? We answer,

1. From the temporal benefits by which the Gospel was confirmed—

[These were certainly very great, and gave much occasion for joy, even among those who had no spiritual perception of its excellency. It could not fail to rejoice all who were related to the persons on whom the miraculous cures were effected, yea, and all too who had any measure of benevolence in their hearts.

And there is similar ground for joy wherever the light of the Gospel shines; for it banishes many dark and wicked superstitions, infanticide, parricide, the burning of women at the funeral of their husbands, together with innumerable other cruel and horrid practices. And still more, wherever the Gospel is preached with power, the people at large, as well as those who feel its influence, have reason to rejoice in it: for there all benevolent Institutions are set on foot; the education of poor children, and their instruction in the faith of Christ, are attended to; Societies are formed for the visiting of the sick, and the relief of the needy; and the general tone of morals is raised: and all these are, to the ungodly, (what miracles were in the days of old,) evidences of the truth and excellency of that Gospel, which produces such fruits.

We admit therefore that the miraculous cures were to them one source of joy: and we affirm, that every city into which the Gospel now comes, has, on similar grounds, good reason for a joyful reception of it.]

2. From

2. From the spiritual benefits which they experienced in their own souls—

[Multitudes of them, who had long been "led captive by the devil at his will," now had their chains broken, and were "delivered from the power of darkness, and translated into the kingdom of God's dear Son." A sense of God's pardoning love was now shed abroad in their hearts; and they had "a Spirit of adoption given them, whereby they could cry, Abba, Father." Now they were brought as it were into a new world; "old things passed away, and all things were become new:" they had new views, new desires, new pursuits, new joys, even such as they never before had the least idea of. Can we wonder then that their "joy was great?" The Gospel, when published by angels at the Saviour's birth, was proclaimed as "glad tidings of great joy to all people:" and the Prophets had all with one voice represented it in the same light[c] — — — And we can appeal to all who have ever tasted its sweetness, that it is indeed "a feast of fat things full of marrow, of wines on the lees well refined."]

3. From the eternal benefits which were opened to their view—

[The kingdom into which Believers are brought, is but the commencement of that which is perfected in heaven. The peace and holiness which are enjoyed here, are the blossom which will be brought to maturity in a better world. Grace is glory begun; and glory is grace consummated. Besides, the subjects of the Redeemer's kingdom will each have a crown and kingdom of his own: "the glory which his Father has given him, he has bestowed on them:" they all without exception are "kings and priests unto God;" and "they shall reign for ever and ever." Who must not rejoice in such a prospect as this? Truly if, with such a view of the happiness laid up for us in the eternal world, we did not rejoice, we should be more stupid, than beasts, more insensible than stones. But no one can be "begotten again to a lively hope of this inheritance," without feeling in his soul a heaven begun, and "rejoicing in Christ with a joy unspeakable and glorified[d]."]

APPLICATION—

1. Who then amongst us desires this joy?

[Behold how the Samaritans obtained it: they "with one accord gave heed unto the things which Philip spake:" and the same attention to the Gospel now will be productive of the

[c] For the spiritual benefit, see Isai. xxxv. 1, 2. & lv. 12, 13. And for the joy excited by it quote Isai. xliv. 23. & *the whole* 98th Psalm.
[d] 1 Pet. i. 3—5, 8, 9.

the same effects. The Gospel which we preach, is the same as was preached by him: we "preach Christ unto you:" we preach him as "the Alpha and Omega, the first and the last," the "All in all" in the salvation of man. O "give earnest heed to what the Scripture declares" concerning him[e]; treasure it up in your minds, and live upon it in your hearts[f]; and it shall operate, as it did in them, to your present and eternal welfare.]

2. Are there any amongst us who experience this joy?

[Then endeavour to "walk worthy of Him who hath called you unto his kingdom and glory[g]." To this we would exhort you with paternal authority and love[h]. Do you ask, *How* you are to walk worthy of him? we answer, By uniting closely with each other in faith and love[i], and being increasingly fruitful in every good work[k]. Let it be remembered, that this is the very end for which "God has called you out of darkness into his marvellous light," that you should "shew forth his praise," and glorify his name.]

[e] Heb. ii. 1. [f] Heb. iv. 2. [g] 1 Thess. ii. 12.
[h] 1 Thess. ii. 11. [i] Phil. i. 27. [k] Col. i. 10.

DCCCLXIV.

PHILIP AND THE EUNUCH.

Acts viii. 35. *Then Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same scripture, and preached unto him Jesus.*

IF God have designs of love and mercy towards any person, he will be at no loss for means whereby to accomplish them. We can have no doubt but that the Ethiopian Eunuch was chosen, like the apostle Paul, even from his mother's womb; yet had he left Jerusalem, where all the Apostles were assembled, without obtaining any knowledge of Christ Jesus. Moreover, he was now going to his own country, where the light of the Gospel had never shone, and where he seemed to be altogether beyond its reach. But God, by an angel, ordered Philip to go into the desert, through which the Eunuch was travelling; and then, by his Spirit, directed him to join himself to his carriage; that so he might communicate to him

him the knowledge he stood in need of, and lead him to the enjoyment of everlasting life.

The Eunuch was reading an interesting portion of Scripture, which he did not understand: and Philip, at his request, went up into the chariot with him, and expounded it to him.

The points to which we would draw your attention are,

I. The passage expounded—

[This is one of the most important passages in all the Prophetic writings. The Prophets indeed all speak of Christ in some measure; but Isaiah more than any other; insomuch that he has been called, The Evangelical Prophet: but of all his writings, there is not any other part so full, so plain, so rich as this: it might be rather taken for a history of past events, than a prophecy of things to come; so minute and circumstantial is it, in all that relates to the person, character, and office of Jesus Christ.

The precise words which the Eunuch was reading, are a part of a discourse or prophecy beginning at the 13th verse of the 52d chapter of Isaiah, and extending to the close of the 53d chapter. Some difficulty in the explanation of them arises from a difference between the Hebrew copies, and the Septuagint translation, from which the words were quoted: though in fact the sense in both is nearly the same; namely, that the person there spoken of was treated with the utmost injustice; that no one would offer a single word in his defence; and that he was cut off as a malefactor. The main difficulty in the Eunuch's mind was, to ascertain "of whom the prophet spake: whether of himself, or of some other person:" and this is a difficulty which the modern Jews are unable to surmount. The antient Jews admitted, that the whole discourse related to the Messiah: but since the Messiah has come and fulfilled that prophecy, the Jews interpret it as referring to their nation, who were punished for their offences. But the most superficial reader will see in a moment the absurdity of such an interpretation: for we are told again and again, that the person who suffered, suffered for the sins of others, and not for his own; and that "by his stripes the people of God were healed." So plain is the prophet's whole discourse, that nothing but the most inveterate prejudice can prevent any man from seeing its accomplishment in Jesus Christ: and we trust, that, at a future period, it will be the principal source of conviction to the whole Jewish nation, and make them, as it did the Eunuch in his own country, instrumental to the salvation of the Heathen world.]

Such

Such is the passage which Philip undertook to explain. Let us next consider,

II. The exposition given—

[" He began at the same Scripture, and preached unto him Jesus." Of course he would explain the terms, and shew the perfect accomplishment of them in Jesus, together with the impossibility of referring them to any other person. This was the method which Peter adopted on the day of Pentecost, when he shewed that David's prophecy relative to the resurrection of Christ could not be interpreted of David himself, but was actually fulfilled in Christ[a]. Now this passage would afford him a fair opportunity of declaring every thing relating to Christ, as far as the time would admit, and the occasion required. The *person* of Christ, as God's Son and "Servant[b]; his unparalleled *sufferings*[c]; *the vicarious nature of those sufferings*[d]; (seeing that he had no sin of his own, but suffered under the load of our sins[e];) his *resurrection* to a new and heavenly life[f]; his prevailing *intercession* for us at the right hand of God[g]; and all *the victories of his grace* in the conversion and salvation of a ruined world[h]: and lastly, *the certainty of salvation to all who should know, and believe on him*[i]: these, and many other glorious truths, he would have occasion to open to him, as lying on the very surface of the prophecy he was contemplating: and these truths well understood, and received into the heart as the ground of our hopes before God, are sufficient for every end and purpose of man's salvation. What can be added to them to relieve a doubting mind? In the atonement and intercession of Christ there is all that is necessary to satisfy an offended God, and consequently to satisfy and heal a wounded conscience. What can be added to stimulate us to holy obedience? If the wonders of redeeming love will not operate effectually on our hearts, nothing will; we must be "past feeling," "given over to a reprobate mind."

"From this passage then we would preach Jesus unto you." O contemplate what he has done and suffered for you! ———— think also of what he is yet doing for you in heaven ———— and let him now "see of the travail of his soul, and be satisfied" in the conversion and salvation of your souls ————]

The excellence of his instructions may be judged of by

III. The

[a] Acts ii. 25—36.
[b] Isai. lii. 13. & liii. 11.
[c] Isai. lii. 14. & liii. 3.
[d] ib. liii. 4—6.
[e] ib. liii. 9, 10.
[f] ib. ver. 13.
[g] ib.
[h] ib. ver. 10—12.
[i] ib. ver. 1, 11.

III. The effect produced—

[The Eunuch's eyes were opened, and he saw "that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God." Instantly therefore did he determine to surrender up himself to him as a faithful follower and servant: and, understanding that baptism was the rite whereby he must be admitted into covenant with him, he desired to have that rite administered to him without delay: which desire Philip hesitated not to comply with, as soon as he was convinced that his views of Christ were such as qualified him for admission into the Christian Church.

Who must not admire the decision of character here manifested. The situation of the Eunuch, as a leading person in a great empire, might seem to have justified his deferring such a step, till he had viewed it in all its bearings, and formed his judgment upon the maturest consideration. But his mind and conscience were convinced; and he would not give opportunity to Satan to get advantage over him: he therefore "conferred not with flesh and blood," but gave himself up instantly and unreservedly to God.

After he was baptized, and Philip was in a miraculous manner separated from him, "he went on his way rejoicing." And well might he rejoice in having found such a Saviour, and in all the rich communications of grace and peace which were now imparted to his soul———]

Such being the effect of this blessed interview, let US LEARN,

1. To improve our leisure in reading the holy Scriptures—

[The Eunuch, though so great a man, thought it not unworthy of him to study the word of God; nor, though occupied with the affairs of a kingdom, did he plead a pressure of business for the neglect of it: nor, though he found it beyond the reach of his understanding, did he cast it away as unintelligible: but regarding it as inspired of God, he searched into it with humility and diligence. Let us then follow his example: let us not plead, that it is the proper study of Ministers only, or that we have not time to study it, or ability to understand it; but let us account it our delight to meditate on the word, on the sabbath-day especially, and at all other times, whenever the necessary business of our respective callings will admit of it———]

2. To avail ourselves of every opportunity of instruction—

[Philip probably appeared but in a humble garb, such as befitted his employment, and the persecuted state of the Church

Church at that time: but the Eunuch did not disdain to ask instruction from him, or to invite him up into his chariot for the purpose of obtaining it. He wisely judged, that they are the best instructors who are themselves taught of God: and, conceiving that Philip was better acquainted with the Scripture than himself, he gladly availed himself of the opportunity which his presence afforded him. Let us in like manner seek, whether from men or books, all possible information concerning the will of God; and let us remember, that, as the Eunuch had gained no saving knowledge at Jerusalem, where all the Apostles were, yet found it in the desert, so may we be guided into all truth by the instrumentality of persons from whom we might least expect so rich a boon. "God will divide to every man severally as he will," and by whom he will.]

3. To follow the convictions of our own conscience—

[As soon as the Eunuch saw the path of duty, he followed it. He had before, from Heathenism become a Jew; and now, from being a Jew, he embraced Christianity. Now he might well have suspected that all the courtiers in his own country would accuse him of unpardonable weakness and versatility: but he regarded not the judgment of man: he desired and determined to approve himself to the heart-searching God: and it was in consequence of this that he went on his way rejoicing. If he had halted in his mind, or indulged the fear of man, he would not have been favoured with those sublime and heavenly joys: but "those who faithfully serve God, God will honour." Let us then, like Caleb and Joshua, "follow the Lord fully:" if we stand alone, like Elijah, let us not be ashamed; but whatever God requires us to do, let us do it instantly and without reserve.]

DCCCLXV.

CONVERSION OF ST. PAUL.

Acts ix. 3—6. *And as he journeyed, he came near Damascus: and suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven: and he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? And he said, Who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest: it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks. And he, trembling and astonished, said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?*

IT has pleased God to give us every evidence of the

the truth of our religion, that the most scrupulous mind could desire. The proofs arising from prophecies and miracles, are such as to carry irresistible conviction to every candid inquirer. But suppose a sceptical person to wish for further proof, and to say, "Let me see a man, who, being fully competent to judge of the question, and decidedly hostile to Christianity in his heart, is yet convinced at last of its truth: let me see him, while yet all the opportunities of detecting imposture are open to him, embracing Christianity himself, and propagating it with all his might, and braving death in its most tremendous forms in support of it: then I shall be indeed convinced that it is of Divine original:" I say, suppose a person unreasonable enough to desire such a proof, and determining, like Thomas, not to believe, till this evidence has been afforded him; we would meet him on his own ground, and produce him precisely such an instance as he requires. In the conversion of the apostle Paul all these things unite: and, from the frequency with which that event is related in the Scriptures, it seems to have been intended by God as a strong confirmation of the truth of our religion. In the passage before us, it is stated by the historian: but, in two other places, it is related by St. Paul himself; who adduces the circumstances that attended it as an unquestionable proof of his own Divine mission, and of the truth of that Gospel which he preached.

In considering St. Paul's conversion, we shall notice it in different points of view;

I. As a record for our instruction—

To enumerate the particular truths illustrated and confirmed by this event, would be endless: we shall therefore wave all mention of them, and confine our attention to the two leading features contained in the history; and observe,

1. How blindly man acts in the discharge of his duty—

[If ever there was a man that possessed advantages for the

the knowledge of his duty, it was Saul of Tarsus. He was educated under Gamaliel, the most eminent teacher of his day, and made a proficiency in learning beyond most of his contemporaries; and he was eminently distinguished for those moral habits, which peculiarly qualify the mind for the reception of truth. Yet behold, this man conceived himself to be rendering acceptable service to his God, while persecuting his Church with the most unrelenting barbarity. Methinks, even reason itself should have taught him, that men ought not to be so treated, merely for entertaining novel sentiments, and for following the convictions of their minds. If indeed they were violating the public peace, and destroying the welfare of the State, the ringleaders of them might well be apprehended and tried: but to seize all whom he could lay his hands upon, and to drag women as well as men to prison and to death, for no other crime than that of peaceably professing a new religion, was as contrary to humanity as to common sense.

Happy would it be if this erroneous mode of serving God had been confined to that age! but there are still many, who "have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge;" many, who can see the wicked going on in their wickedness, and never once stretch forth their hand to turn them back; but the moment they see persons embracing and obeying the Gospel of Christ, are filled with alarm, and think any methods proper to be used for stopping their progress. Our Lord himself told us, beforehand, that it would be so, and that men would even "think they did God service in killing us." Were these malignant dispositions found only among the ungodly and profane, we should not so much wonder at them: but they are found equally among the wise, the moral, and the conscientious. And this shews us, that when we see such persons opposing the Gospel, we ought to pity them, and to pray for them, and to give them credit for meaning well, even whilst they are fighting against God with all their might. And it may teach us at the same time, that we also are fallible, and that we may be deceiving our own souls, even whilst we are most confident that we are acting right. "There is a way, says Solomon, that seemeth right unto a man; but the end thereof are the ways of death."]

2. How sovereignly God acts in the exercise of his grace—

[Madly as Saul was persecuting the Church, our blessed Saviour stopped him in his career, discovered to him his error, and made him a chosen vessel to propagate the faith which he had so laboured to destroy. Of those that were in company with him, not one, as far as we know, was made a partaker

partaker of the same mercy. They saw the light indeed, and heard the voice; but they understood not the things that were spoken[b], nor did they experience the same effects from the vision. And why was Saul so distinguished from the rest? What was there in that ferocious persecutor to *merit* such a favour? In vain shall we look for any other cause, but that which St. Paul himself assigns; "God separated me from my mother's womb, and called me by his grace[c]:"—"By the grace of God I am what I am."

Now this doctrine is offensive to many: they claim a right to dispose of their own things as they will, and yet deny the same right to God. But his grace is his own, and he will dispense it to whomsoever he will; "nor will he give account to us of any of his matters:" "He will have mercy on whom he will have mercy, and will have compassion on whom he will have compassion." How strongly does St. Paul state this, in the Epistle to the Romans! "A potter hath power over the clay, to make, of the same lump, vessels of honour, and vessels unto dishonour: and such is the right which God claims. If in the pride of our hearts we reply, "Why then doth God find fault? for who hath resisted his will?" the Apostle thus indignantly reproves our presumption; "Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say unto him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus?" Let us acknowledge what in the case before us is perfectly undeniable, that God "saves us, and calls us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began:" and, if we will look for a reason, let this suffice us, "Even so, Father, for so it seemeth good in thy sight."]

Another view in which we should contemplate the conversion of St. Paul, is peculiarly important; namely,

II. As a model for our imitation—

Conversion is as necessary for us as ever it was for him; for though we are Christians already in name, we are not living members of Christ's mystical body, till we have been born again of the Spirit of God[d]. But here let it be distinctly noticed, that we must separate from St. Paul's conversion every thing that was miraculous, or that was peculiar to him: we are not to expect visions, or voices, or miracu-

[b] Compare ver. 7. with xxii. 9. [c] Gal. i. 15.
[d] Compare John iii. 3. with Rom. ii. 28, 29.

miraculous interpositions of any kind: but that which constituted the essential part of his conversion we must expect, and must experience too, if ever we would be numbered with the saints of God. We must have, like Paul,

1. An enlightened mind—

[For three days and nights he continued blind; and at the expiration of that time, "there fell, as it were, scales from his eyes[e]." This was doubtless intended as an emblematical representation to him of the blindness of his state by nature, and of the light into which he was now to be brought. Notwithstanding his great learning in the Scriptures, yet was he blind to the great truths contained in them. Thus we in like manner are blind to the spiritual import of the Scriptures, till God the Holy Spirit is pleased to "open the eyes of our understanding." "The natural man, whatever advantages he may enjoy, receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." Not that a converted person must of necessity become acquainted with new truths; but he will know them in a perfectly different manner. He may have had the whole system of religion treasured up in his mind before; but now he contemplates the Gospel, as a shipwrecked mariner regards a vessel by which he has been rescued from a watery grave: he sees, that there is in it the exact provision which his necessities required, and a merciful pledge of his safe conveyance to the desired haven."]

A convinced conscience—

[St. Paul before his conversion thought he was certainly in a state of acceptance with God: but when he began to view his past life in the glass of God's law, he saw himself a dead, and condemned sinner: "I was alive without the law once," says he; "but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died." As to that zeal which he had exercised in persecuting the Church, he saw that it was impious in the highest degree; and, in reference to it, he called himself "a blasphemer, and injurious, and a persecutor," yea, even "the very chief of sinners." Thus must we also be humbled under a sense of our lost condition. What though we have not committed precisely the same sins as he, "we all have offended in many things," and are therefore deserving of God's everlasting wrath and indignation: and the very first effect of Divine illumination will be, to make us "smite on our breast, and cry, God be merciful to me a sinner!"

3. A re-

[e] ver. 9, 18.

3. A renewed will—

[Hitherto this furious bigot had been following his own will, and the will of the chief priests who sent him: but now he cries, "Lord, what wilt *Thou* have me to do?" Behold, how entirely he commits himself to the guidance of that Jesus, whom now he saw to be the Saviour of the world! He professes himself ready to comply with any direction that shall be given him; and determines henceforth to have no other rule of conduct than his Saviour's will. Here is the crown and summit of true conversion: we may have enlightened minds, and yet retain an unsanctified heart: we may have somewhat of a wounded spirit, and yet hold fast our iniquities: but if our will be changed, then it is certain that we have received the grace of God in truth. This therefore we must seek after: we must say to our blessed Lord, "Other lords beside thee have had dominion over me, but henceforth I will regard none but thee:" 'I will search out thy will, as it is revealed unto men; I will take it in all things as a light unto my feet; and I will labour, through grace, to have even the thoughts of my heart brought into an unreserved obedience to it.']

Whilst we regard this work of Divine grace as a model for our imitation, let us behold it,

II. As an example for our encouragement—

In this view it was particularly designed of God; as St. Paul himself informs us: "For this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first, Jesus Christ might shew forth all long-suffering, for *a pattern to them* who *shall hereafter believe on him* to life everlasting[f]." Truly in the conversion of this bitter persecutor we see,

1. How far the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ can reach—

[We can scarcely conceive a state more desperate than that of Saul, when "breathing out threatenings and slaughter" against the saints of God: yet to him was mercy vouchsafed, and *that* too unsought, and unsolicited. Who then has any reason to despair? Who can say, My iniquities are too great to be forgiven? Let the weary and heavy-laden sinner, who is ready to say, "There is no hope," take courage, and lift up his soul to God in fervent prayer: for the blood of Christ is as effectual to cleanse from sin, as ever it was; and its virtue shall extend as far as ever, even to the very chief of sinners. "Where sin has abounded, grace shall much more abound;" and

[f] 1 Tim. i. 16.

and "sins of a scarlet or a crimson dye" shall yet be washed away, so that the offender shall be made "white as snow."]

2. What great things the grace of Christ can effect—

[This man, who, previous to his conversion, was the bitterest enemy both of God and man, was transformed into a most distinguished friend of both. Of all the Apostles, not one excelled him in piety, or equalled him in laborious exertions for the cause of Christ. His besetting sins were all subdued, and his virtues were brought to the highest perfection. This change in him was, as it were, instantaneous; so that in him was fully and at once, verified that description of sound conversion, "Old things passed away, and all things became new." Who then shall hereafter think himself enslaved beyond a possibility of redemption? Is not that grace which wrought effectually in Paul, sufficient for *us?* Can any thing be too hard for the Lord? Let not any then despond, under an idea that his corruptions are too deep and inveterate ever to be eradicated: for that same Jesus is yet possessed of all power in heaven and in earth, and is still "able to save to the uttermost all that come unto God by him."]

APPLICATION—

[Let me, in conclusion, remind you all, that by nature you are "alienated from God," and "enemies to him in your minds by wicked works; and more especially are you adverse to the humiliating doctrines of the Gospel. But Jesus now speaks to each of you by name, as he did to the apostle Paul, "Why despisest thou me? Why turnest thou away from me?" On you he looks with the same compassion as he did on him, and warns you, that "it is in vain to kick against the pricks." The greater part of sinners, it is true, are unconscious that they are fighting against the Lord Jesus Christ: in many things they do, they really think themselves acting inoffensively, or perhaps agreeably to the will of God: but a neglect of the Gospel, no less than direct opposition to it, is an act of hostility to the Lord Jesus Christ, and must finally issue in our destruction. Listen then to his still small voice, and accept his gracious invitations: and if those around you are regardless of his call, let your minds at least be humbled, if peradventure you may be distinguished by him as chosen vessels of his mercy, and happy monuments of his grace.]

DCCCLXVI.

SAUL'S PRAYER.

Acts ix. 11. *Behold, he prayeth.*

WHEN we speak of the grace of God as the free and only source of good to man, we are often misunderstood,

understood, as though we affirmed that man is wholly passive in the work of salvation: whereas, the truth is, that though, in the first instance, God puts into his heart the good desire, that desire immediately exerts itself in voluntary and earnest efforts for the attainment of the thing desired. This is discoverable in the conversion of Saul: in the first instance, God stopped him in his career of sin, and discovered to him his guilt and danger; but from that moment Saul gave himself to fasting and prayer, that by those means he might obtain yet further blessings from God: and God, as though he would shew us in the most striking manner the necessity of our own personal exertions, expressly pointed out to Ananias the *reason* of his communicating further blessings to Saul through his instrumentality; "Go, and inquire for one called Saul of Tarsus; for behold, he prayeth."

We will endeavour to point out,

I. What there was in that prayer which attracted the Divine notice—

We cannot doubt but that Saul, who was "touching the righteousness of the law blameless," had often bowed his knees before God in prayer: but he had never prayed aright till now. In this prayer of his was,

1. Humility—

[He never could have prayed with true humility before, because he was unconscious of his lost estate. He was ignorant of the spirituality of the law, and, consequently, of his multiplied transgressions against it: he even thought himself "alive," as having never given to God any just cause to condemn him. What then must his prayers have been, but, like those of the Pharisee, "I thank thee, O God, that I am not as other men are!"? But contrition is the very essence of prayer: it is "the broken and contrite heart, which God will not despise." To "smite upon our breasts," as guilty self-condemning sinners, and to "cry for mercy," like the poor Publican, is more acceptable to God than all the sacrifices and burnt-offerings that ever were offered.]

2. Earnestness—

[It is a sense of need that must make us earnest: and, as Saul was insensible of his danger, he could not till now plead

plead with that importunity that became him. But now he was like the manslayer fleeing from the avenger of blood. Now, like his Lord and Saviour, he "made prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears[a]:" and, like the patriarch Jacob, he wrestled with God, saying, "I will not let thee go, except thou bless me[b]." Instantly therefore did God fulfil to him that promise which Jesus has left us for the encouragement of all his people[c].]

3. Faith—

[The prayers which Saul had offered in former times could not have had respect to a Saviour, because he had not felt his need of a Saviour. But now he saw that there was no hope of mercy, but through that very Jesus whom he had persecuted: now he thankfully embraced the salvation that Jesus offered him: he no longer "went about to establish a righteousness of his own, but gladly submitted to the righteousness of God" revealed in the Gospel. When he said, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" he cordially received Christ as "his wisdom, his righteousness, his sanctification and redemption:" and no sooner did he thus desire to make Christ his all, than God expressed his acceptance of his prayers, "Behold he prayeth!" God would not suffer the prayer of faith to go forth in vain.]

We propose, in the next place, to shew,

II. What we may learn from the notice which God took of it—

This fact is very instructive: it shews us,

1. That God is observant of our frame and conduct—

["The eye of God is in every place, beholding the evil and the good." But more especially does he look upon the humble suppliant: he himself declares, "To this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and that trembleth at my word[d]." Behold, when a holy purpose was formed in the heart of Ephraim, how attentive God was to it; "Ephraim saith, What have I to do any more with idols?" Surely, saith God, "I have heard him, and observed him[e]." And when the same penitent laid his transgressions more deeply to heart, God quite exulted over him, if we may so speak: "Surely I have heard Ephraim bemoaning himself thus"———And then, with a complacent regard to him, God appealed, as it were, to the whole universe;

[a] Heb. v. 7. [b] Hos. xii. 4. [c] Mat. vii. 7 8
[d] Isai. lxvi. 2. [e] Hos. xiv. 8.

universe; "Is not Ephraim my dear son? is he not a pleasant child[f]?"———]

2. That mere formal services are not accounted prayer in God's sight—

[All the petitions which Saul had offered in former times were a mere lip-service which God did not accept. "God is a Spirit; and those who worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth:" the heart must accompany the lips, or else the worship is hypocritical and vain[g]. This is strongly marked by the prophet Jeremiah, who tells us that *then*, and then *only*, shall God be found, when we seek for him with our whole heart[h].]

3. That humble and believing prayer shall never go forth in vain—

[God may see fit to suspend his answer for a time: even in the case before us, he did not answer till Saul had continued in prayer three whole days and nights. But "though he tarry, he will come at last:" he has assured us, in the parable of the importunate Widow, that the prayer of faith shall never be in vain[i]: and in very many instances he fulfils to men that promise which he has given us by the prophet Isaiah, "It shall come to pass, that before they call, I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear[k]."]

ADDRESS,

1. To those who never pray at all—

[Alas! how many are there of whom the All-seeing God must say, "Behold, he rises from his bed without prayer: he goes through the day, and retires to rest again, without prayer: this is his constant habit: the sins he commits, excite in him no compunction; and the mercies he receives, call forth no gratitude: he lives without God in the world: ungrateful wretch that he is, he never calls upon my name: never once in all his life could I truly say of him, "Behold he prayeth." Brethren, do you not know that all this neglect is recorded in the book of God's remembrance, and that it must be accounted for at last? Do not deceive yourselves with an idea that your formal heartless services are accepted of *him*; for, if he that wavereth in his mind through unbelieving fears shall receive nothing of the Lord, much less shall *he* receive any thing who never asks with any real desire to obtain the blessings he asks for[l].]

2. To those who do pray—

[It

[f] Jer. xxxi. 18—20. [g] Matt. xv. 8, 9. [h] Jer. xxix. 13, 14.
[i] Luke xviii. 7. [k] Isai. lxv. 24. [l] Jam. i. 6, 7.

[It is a great mercy if our minds have been so far awakened to a sense of our guilt and danger, that we have been constrained to cry to God for deliverance. But we are ever prone to relapse into coldness and formality: indeed there is nothing more difficult than to keep up a spirit of prayer, and to live nigh to God, in a state of habitual fellowship with him. Any little thing, however trifling and insignificant, is sufficient to divert our attention from prayer, or to distract our minds in the performance of it. Hence we are so often exhorted to pray without ceasing, to watch unto prayer, to continue instant in it with all perseverance. Let us then guard against fainting or weariness in this holy duty. It will be of no benefit to us to have sought after God in former times, if we decline from him now: our former prayers will be of no service, if they be discontinued. As our former sinfulness shall not be remembered, when once we turn unto God in penitence and faith; so neither shall our past righteousness be remembered, if we depart from it.

It is possible that we may be hindered in this duty, by an apprehension that we shall not be heard: but we must guard against this temptation, by recollecting, that there is no guilt so great but the prayer of faith can remove it[m], nor any state so desperate from which it shall not prevail to deliver us[n]. "God never did, nor ever will say to any, 'Seek ye my face' in vain."]

[m] See the peculiar stress laid on prayer in reference to Manasseh; 2 Chron. xxxiii. 12, 13, 18, 19.

[n] Jon. ii. 1—4.

DCCCLXVII.

DORCAS RESTORED TO LIFE.

Acts ix. 39, 40. *Then Peter arose, and went with them. When he was come, they brought him into an upper chamber: and all the widows stood by weeping, and shewing the coats and garments which Dorcas made while she was with them. But Peter put them all forth, and kneeled down, and prayed: and turning him unto the body, said, Tabitha, arise. And she opened her eyes: and when she saw Peter, she sat up.*

HOWEVER careful the Ministers of Christ may be in stating the great doctrine of salvation by faith, their adversaries will represent them as enemies to good works. The denying to good works the office of justifying men before God, is thought to destroy every inducement to perform them. But if we look at the conduct of the first Christians, we shall see in that

that an ample refutation of this error. Dorcas, for instance, was "a disciple," looking for salvation through the merits of a crucified Redeemer: but was she therefore regardless of good works? Did she not rather abound in them? and was not this the foundation of that high esteem in which she has been held by the Church of God in all ages? That we may be stirred up to follow her example, let us consider the account here given of her:

I. Her character—

What was her condition in life we do not exactly know; but we suppose that she was in a middle state, between poverty and riches: but of the use that she made of her time and property, we are fully informed: she employed herself much in administering to the necessities of the poor, and particularly in making garments for them. In a word, her character was,

1. Most lovely in itself—

[The doing of good in any way is amiable; but her mode of doing it was peculiarly so; inasmuch as it argued an habit of consideration, compassion, diligence, and self-denial. The bestowing of money is a small act of love in comparison of hers: for though money will procure necessaries for the poor, yet her mode of disposing of it made it go farther, if we may so speak, than if it had been expended by the poor themselves; and at the same time, it kept alive in her heart a constant principle of love. By this practice of hers the poor were continually, as it were, before her eyes; she thought for them, acted for them, worked for them, and sought her own happiness in contributing to theirs. As her Lord and Master "went about doing good," so she made it her daily business and occupation to diffuse blessings all around her: she not only "*did* good works," but was *full* of them, and made the exercises of benevolence her habitual *practice*[a].]

2. Most acceptable to God—

[Doubtless, if her actions had proceeded from an ostentatious or self-righteous principle, they could not have been pleasing to God; for "without faith it is impossible to please him:" but if they were the fruits of faith in Christ, they were most truly acceptable unto God. See how strongly this is declared

[a] This is the real force of the words ὧν ἐποίει, ver. 36. Compare 1 John iii. 9. in the Greek.

declared in different parts of Holy Writ[b]———In speaking on this subject, many religious persons feel a very undue degree of jealousy: they are afraid of declaring all that God says respecting the value of such works in his sight, lest they should appear to countenance a self-righteous spirit: but, if only we carefully exclude the idea of their being *meritorious*, or availing any thing for our justification before God, it is scarcely possible to state too strongly the delight which God takes in them, or the certainty of their being most richly recompensed in the eternal world[c]: every one of them is a loan "lent to the Lord[d];" and he would consider himself unjust, if he should forget so much as one of them in the great day of final retribution[e]: not even a cup of cold water given for his sake, shall pass unnoticed, or lose its reward[f].]

Her piety however did not exempt her from the common lot of mortality. We are next called to contemplate,

II. Her death—

Like others, "she fell sick and died." But though disease and death were permitted to cut her off even as the wicked, and thereby to shew that "all things come alike to all," yet there was an immense difference between her and others in the regret experienced for the loss of her—

[A tear or two is all the tribute that is paid to the greater part of mankind, except by those who are their near relatives, or immediate dependents. But at the loss of her, all the Church at Joppa mourned; and the greatest solicitude was expressed to have her restored to them from the dead. They had heard of Peter healing by a word a man who had been confined to his bed for eight years[g]; they deputed therefore two persons to wait upon him, (for he was only about six miles off,) to request his interposition with God in their behalf: and, when he came, they expressed their grief in the most affecting manner; shewed him at the same time the fruits of her industry and benevolence, that so they might interest his feelings, and engage his prayers for her restoration to life.

What a blessed testimony was this! how much better than the fulsome eulogies of panegyrists, or the funeral pomp of kings! yes, the tears of the godly, and the lamentations of the poor, are the noblest monuments that departed worth can have.

[b] Heb. xiii. 16. Phil. iv. 18. [c] 1 Tim. vi. 17—19.
[d] Prov. xix. 17. [e] Heb. vi. 10. [f] Matt. x. 42.
[g] ver. 33, 34.

have. O that we may all so live, as to be thus regretted by the Lord's people, and to have our memory engraven in the hearts of all who knew us! And let us take care that the survivors may have substantial proofs of our piety to exhibit. We are not all able to do good in the same way, or to the same extent: but we may all have some "works to praise us in the gates [h]," and some fruits "to evince the sincerity of our faith" and love.]

The success of their application to Peter leads us to notice,

III. Her restoration to life—

Peter having been introduced into the chamber where the corpse lay, desired all to depart, that he might not be interrupted in his supplications to the Deity: and, when he had obtained his request, he presented her alive again to her friends.

What an unspeakable benefit was this to the world!

[Whilst her own immediate friends had the comfort of her society, and the poor enjoyed the benefit of her pious labours, the whole Church of God were edified with her bright example. It is astonishing what one person may do, by the mere influence of his own example; how many he may stimulate, how many he may encourage. We may well suppose, that, where her conduct was so highly admired, she was the means of promoting many acts of benevolence in others, who without such an example would either never have exerted themselves at all, or never to so great an extent. Even to the ungodly world her restoration to life was an unspeakable blessing; since many, by means of it, were stirred up to inquire into the truth of Christianity, and to believe in that Jesus whom they had before despised [i].]

Nor was it any other than a blessing to herself—

[We cannot suppose that there was left in her mind any remembrance of her felicity in her disembodied state, at least any such remembrance as should cause regret: we take for granted that she was restored to all her former habits of mind, with the same disposition to enjoy the society of her friends, and to abound in every good work. What a comfort then must it be to her to behold those who had so bitterly bewailed her loss! With what redoubled energy would she betake herself to her former labours of love; knowing now, from experience, how short her time might be either for the benefiting

[h] Prov. xxxi. 31. [i] ver. 42.

fiting of the poor or the glorifying of her God! And these renewed labours would of necessity be recorded, like all her former works, and would follow her when she should rest from them, and augment her weight of glory to all eternity. Surely all this must be considered as a blessing to her soul. As Paul, though desirous to die and be with Christ, was yet content to live that he might serve and honour God in the work of the ministry; so might she be well content to live on earth again, seeing that her opportunities of benefiting the poor, and honouring God, and advancing her own eternal welfare, would be thus prolonged.]

ADDRESS,

1. Those who are living for themselves—

[This is the state of mankind at large; "all men seek their own, and not the things of Jesus Christ[k]"———But this is highly criminal: our time, our talents, our very bodies and souls, are the Lord's, and must be altogether employed for his glory[l]——— All profession of religion unaccompanied with activity in good works, is vain[m]. The very intent of the Gospel is to make us diligent in the performance of them[n]; nor can we ever answer the design of our Lord's sufferings, if we do not live, not unto ourselves, but unto Him that died for us and rose again[o]."]

2. Those who profess to be living unto God—

[Study, like Dorcas, how you can be most useful to the poor: consider their wants, and how you may most effectually relieve them. In "bearing the burthens of others, you fulfil the law of Christ;" and, in truth, you best consult your own happiness. Who that reads the character of Job[p], must not envy his happiness, as well as admire his piety? Verily there is a delight in acts of benevolence, which cannot be procured by any other means. Let all then who profess religion, shew forth their faith by their works. The poor may do their part, as well as the rich[q]; and shall "be accepted" according to their respective abilities[r].]

[k] Phil. ii. 21.
[l] 1 Cor. vi. 19, 20.
[m] Jam. ii. 13—17. Mat vii. 21.
[n] Tit. iii. 8, 9, 14.
[o] 2 Cor. v. 15. & Rom. xiv. 7—9.
[p] Job xxix. 11—13.
[q] Eph. iv. 28.
[r] 2 Cor. viii. 12.

DCCCLXVIII.

SALVATION OFFERED EQUALLY TO ALL.

Acts x. 34, 35. *Then Peter opened his mouth, and said, Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons; but in every nation,*

nation, he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him.

GOD's purpose of love towards the Gentile world had been made known even from the time that God separated Abraham and his posterity as a peculiar people unto himself. The call of Abraham in an uncircumcised state, and the justifying of him by faith whilst he yet continued uncircumcised, was in itself a sign that God would not ultimately limit his mercies to those of the circumcision: and his declaration, that in Abraham and his seed all the nations of the earth should be blessed, was a pledge that in due time all the nations of the earth, Gentiles as well as Jews, should be blessed in Christ. Our Lord had repeatedly informed his Disciples, that "he had other sheep, which were not of the Jewish fold;" and, that "many should come from the east and from the west, and from the north, and from the south, and sit down with the Patriarchs in the kingdom of heaven;" whilst the Jews, the natural "children of that kingdom, should be cast out." He had given the express command, that "his Gospel should be preached to every creature;" and he had actually "given to Peter the keys of the kingdom of heaven," that he might open the gates thereof both to Jews and Gentiles, In obedience to this commission, Peter had opened the kingdom to the Jews on the day of Pentecost; but so entirely was he under the power of Jewish prejudice, that, for six years, both he, and all the other Apostles, had forborne to preach unto the Gentiles: nor, till he was overcome by the force of evidence which he could no longer doubt, would he believe that the Gentiles were to be admitted to the privileges of the Gospel. His doubts however being at last removed, he, with a mixture of surprise and joy, acknowledged his former error, and proclaimed the blessed truth which we have just read to you.

We propose to state,

I. The import of his words—

Plain as the words of our text appear, they have been

been very differently interpreted by different persons; some supposing them to be decisive upon points, wherewith, in the eyes of others, they have no immediate connexion. We will endeavour therefore to shew,

1. What they do not mean—

[*They do not,* as many imagine, *restrict the Supreme Being in the exercise of his grace.*—God's grace is his own; and he dispenses it according to his own sovereign will and pleasure. That he has done so in former times, it is impossible to deny. Was not Abraham an idolater in the land of Ur? yet "God called him *alone,* and blessed him[a]." In blessing the seed of Abraham, did God take Ishmael, who was born according to nature? No; but gave Abraham a son in a supernatural way, even Isaac; and limited the blessing to *his* line. In the seed of Isaac, God exercised the same sovereign grace; choosing, even whilst they were yet in the womb together, the younger son, Jacob, in preference to Esau, the elder; saying, "Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated[b]." Now, whether we suppose these persons chosen to everlasting salvation or not, it is evident that they were chosen to enjoy *the means* of salvation; and consequently either God is "a respecter of persons," or 'the respecting of persons' must mean something very different from the sovereign distribution of God's favours unto men. We all know that God did vouchsafe peculiar mercies to the Jews above the Heathens; as he still does to the Christian world. If this was not wrong formerly, it is not so now: but Christ himself made this free exercise of God's grace and mercy a ground of praise and thanksgiving; and therefore we also may adore God for it, and say, "I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes; even so, Father, for so it seemed good in thy sight[c]."

Neither do these words establish the doctrine of salvation by works.—If there be any thing plain in God's word, it is, that God has given us a Saviour, through whose obedience unto death we are to be saved. As the whole Jewish Ritual shadowed forth our acceptance through the Great Sacrifice, so the Epistles to the Romans and the Galatians were written on purpose to establish this great truth, that we are to be saved by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, and not by any works of our own. Indeed, if salvation were by works, even in any degree, Christ would so far have died in vain. Moreover, salvation could

[a] Isai. li. 1, 2. [b] Rom ix. 7—13. [c] Mat. xi. 25, 26.

could no more be of grace; because works and grace are opposite to each other; the one implying, that salvation is paid us as a debt; and the other, that it is freely and gratuitously bestowed upon us. Now this being the uniform declaration of God throughout the whole Scripture, it is manifest, that this single expression must be so understood, as to set aside the universal testimony of the written word.

We will now proceed to state,]

2. What they do mean—

[The Jews imagined themselves to be the only people whom God would ever admit to his favour. As for the Gentile world, the Jews regarded them as dogs, and as accursed of the Lord. Some of them went so far as to think, that no Jew, however wicked, would be condemned, nor any Gentile, however righteous, would be saved. Against this kind of error both the Baptist and our Lord bore testimony[d]. And even the Apostles themselves were far from having a correct judgment respecting it: they supposed that God would favour the Jews, because they were Jews; and that he would not look upon the Gentiles, because they were Gentiles. But God had now shewn to Peter, that this was an error: he had shewn to him, that the partition-wall between Jews and Gentiles was broken down; that no man was henceforth to be accounted unclean; that his Gospel was to be freely preached to all, without any distinction; and that all, of whatever nation they might be, should be accepted with him, provided they really feared him, and wrought righteousness; that is, that God would not regard any thing in man, but his moral and religious character: if any man possessed ever so many privileges, they should avail nothing to his eternal welfare, unless they were accompanied with such dispositions and actions as characterized the elect of God: but, if any man sought him humbly, and served him faithfully, he should be brought to the knowledge of salvation, and his feet be guided into the way of peace.

That this is the real meaning of the passage, appears from the whole context. Peter no sooner came to Cornelius, than he reminded him of the barrier which had been placed between Jews and Gentiles, so as to cut off all friendly intercourse between them; and told him how that barrier had been removed: and, when he found the account which the messengers had given him, confirmed by Cornelius himself, and that God had interposed as much to direct Cornelius to send for Peter, as to direct Peter to go to him, "he opened his mouth" with a solemnity suited to the occasion, and proclaimed God as the common Father of all mankind, equally accessible

[d] Matt. iii. 9, 10. John viii. 39, 44.

accessible to all, and equally gracious unto all, who should seek and serve him in his appointed way[dd].]

The words thus explained are very instructive. Let us consider,

II. The truths to be deduced from them—

They shew us,

1. That we have nothing to hope from any worldly distinctions—

The Jewish notion of God's regarding men on account of outward distinctions is generally prevalent amongst ourselves. Many fancy, that because we have been baptized, we must of necessity be in a state of favour with God: and many who will not altogether avow that principle, yet imagine that God will not proceed with the same severity against the great and learned, as he will against the poor and ignorant. Hence, though we may be permitted to warn the poor of their guilt and danger, we must not presume to take such a liberty with the rich: we are not to suppose that any of them can perish, or that God requires from them the same homage and service as he does from the lower classes of mankind. But to this point the text is plain and express; "God is no respecter of persons:" his law is equally obligatory on all; and his decisions in the day of judgment will be impartial, every one being judged to happiness or misery according to his works[e]. In the book of Revelation is a passage well deserving the notice of those who think that any regard will be shewn to learning or wealth or honour in that day[ee]——— At the same time, the poor will find it equally instructive to them: for they are ready to suppose that their present trials and difficulties will procure them the same kind of favour in that day, as the rich are looking for on account of their fancied greatness. But the poor, even the poorest bond-slaves, will there be found, associates in misery with their proud oppressors, and equally "calling upon the rocks and mountains to hide them from the wrath of the Lamb." The only difference between one and another will be this: they who were the foremost in religious privileges, will be most signally visited with the Divine judgments: in that only will the Jew be distinguished from the Gentile, or the rich from the poor[f]; "To whom much has been given, of them will the more be required:" but there will be the same ground of judgment for all[g]: the image of Christ upon the soul will be the only thing that will be regarded,

[dd] Rom. x. 11, 12. [e] See Job xxxiv. 19.

[ee] Rev. vi. 15—17. Observe how many words are used to characterize the rich! Does not that speak loudly to them?

[f] Rom. ii. 9—11. [g] 1 Pet. i. 17.

regarded, either as the evidence of our conversion, or as the measure of our recompence[h].]

2. That we have nothing to fear from any secret decrees—

[That "God *chooses* men to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth," is asserted by God himself: but that he *reprobates* any, and from all eternity decreed to consign them over to perdition without any offence or fault of theirs, we cannot admit: we think that *oath* of God's, that "he has no pleasure in the death of a sinner, but rather that he should turn from his wickedness and live," is decisive on the point; and all the reasonings of fallible men are lighter than vanity, in opposition to it. But, not to enter into dispute about these things, one thing is clear, that of whatever sect, or party, or nation we may be, if we "fear God and work righteousness, we shall be accepted." What then have we to do with the Divine decrees? What reason has any man to say, "It is in vain for me to seek after God; because God has not elected me?" Who ever ascended to heaven, to see whether his name were, or were not, written in the book of life? "Secret things must be left to *God*, to whom alone they properly belong: the things that are revealed belong to *us*:" and this declaration in our text is plain, and clear, and absolute. Let every one therefore put away all distressing apprehensions about the decrees of God, and seek to attain that character, which shall infallibly lead to happiness and glory ———]

3. That if we improve diligently the light we have, God will give us more light—

[God forbid that we should for a moment entertain the thought, that we, by any diligence of ours, can *merit* any thing at the hands of God, or lay him under an obligation to confer upon us the blessings of salvation. We have no claim upon him, except that which his own free and gracious promises have given us: but if, in dependence on those promises, we press forward in his appointed way, then may we expect assuredly that those promises shall be fulfilled to us. Now God has promised, that "then shall we know, if we follow on to know the Lord; &c.[i]" We may be confident therefore that we shall not use the means in vain. Whether Cornelius would have been saved if this fresh revelation had not been made to him, we will not take upon ourselves absolutely to determine; though Peter, and the rest of the Apostles appear to have considered his salvation as altogether effected

[h] This is the true meaning of Col. iii. 11.
[i] Hos. vi. 3. Quote and explain the whole verse.

effected by his conversion to Christianity[k]. But throughout the whole history, frequent notice is taken of the prayers and alms of Cornelius, as approved of God, and as being the *means* of bringing down yet greater blessings upon him: they are represented as being accepted before God, precisely as the meat-offerings were accepted from the Jews: as *a memorial* of the latter, when burnt upon the altar, was an offering of a sweet savour unto the Lord[l], so "the prayers and alms of Cornelius came up for *a memorial* before God[m]." Such a memorial shall our prayers and alms-deeds be, if offered unto God with real humility of mind, and with an earnest desire to obtain a fuller knowledge of his will. Though therefore I would not exhort any one to *rest* in a low state of knowledge and of grace, I would encourage the weakest person, if sincere, to expect from God still richer communications of his grace, together with the ultimate possession of his glory. God will "fulfil the *desire* of them that *fear* him, and of them that *hope* in his mercy." Only let us listen to the word of God with the same disposition as Cornelius and his family did[n], and God will rather work miracles to save us, than suffer us to "perish for lack of knowledge." I mean not that God will really work *miracles* for any one; but that he will either, by his providence, bring us an instructor for the further illumination of our minds; or that, by his Spirit, he will guide us into all truth through the instrumentality of the written word: "He never said to any, Seek ye my face in vain."]

[k] Acts xi. 14, 18. [l] Lev. ii. 1, 2, 9. [m] ver. 4. [n] ver. 33.

DCCCLXIX.

DUTY OF CLEAVING TO THE LORD.

Acts xi. 23, 24. *Then tidings of these things came unto the ears of the Church which was in Jerusalem: and they sent forth Barnabas, that he should go as far as Antioch: who, when he came, and had seen the grace of God, was glad, and exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord.*

TO see men converted unto God is a source of very exalted joy: still, however, that joy is by no means unmixed. In viewing a tree full of blossoms, we almost irresistibly contemplate the dangers to which they are exposed, and the probability there is that many of them at least will never come to maturity. Our blessed Lord, in the parable of the Sower, has

has taught us to expect a similar issue in relation to the fruits produced by the Gospel: and experience confirms the truth of his representations. Hence, whilst we rejoice over young converts, we are constrained to "rejoice with trembling." Agreeably to this observation, we find the Apostles invariably labouring "to confirm the souls of the Disciples[a]," and "persuading them to continue in the grace of God[b]." Such was the conduct of Barnabas towards the Disciples at Antioch: "He was glad when he saw the grace of God" manifested in their conversion; but, being "jealous over them with a godly jealousy," he "exhorted them all, without any distinction, that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord." This exhortation of his leads us to contemplate *the dangers* and *the duties* of the Lord's people.

I. The dangers—

Had the new converts been in no danger of departing from the Lord, they had not needed such an earnest exhortation to cleave unto him. But the truth is, that all Christians are in danger,

1. From the ungodly world—

[It is not easy to say which are more replete with danger to the Christian, the frowns, or the smiles, of the ungodly world. Their hatred is often difficult to be borne. When persecution arises from those who are nearly related to us, or invested with authority over us, or on whom our temporal interests materially depend; and more especially when it rages to such an extent that we must forsake all to follow Christ; it requires much grace to meet the trial aright, and much strength to maintain our stedfastness in the Lord's ways. We are apt to give way to that "fear of man which bringeth a snare." On one occasion, Paul was forsaken by all the Church at Rome, through a fear of participating in his trials[c]: nor can any man tell how he shall demean himself under such circumstances, till he is actually placed in them.

Sometimes it happens that our friends, instead of using violence, endeavour to divert us from our purpose by kindness: and then we feel it ten times more difficult to oppose their wishes: we begin to think that it is better to make compliances, and not to adhere too strictly to the requisitions of the

[a] Acts xiv. 21, 22. [b] Acts xiii. 43. [c] 2 Tim. iv. 16.

the Gospel. We flatter ourselves, that by such means we shall soften their prejudices against religion, and perhaps win them to Christ: but in this way we are in danger of wounding our own consciences, and of relapsing altogether into the ways and spirit of the world. A measure of tenderness and conciliation we highly approve; but it may easily be carried too far, and bring us to seek that "friendship of the world which is enmity with God[d]."]

2. From our own corrupt hearts—

[The heart is naturally carnal; and it is but in part renewed even in the best of men: "the flesh still lusteth against the Spirit, as well as the Spirit against the flesh[e]." Paul himself complained that he had "a law in his members warring against the law of his mind, and bringing him into captivity to the law of sin which was in his members[f]." Hence the cares or pleasures of life soon regain an ascendant over us, if we in the least relax our watchfulness against them; or perhaps, like David, we fall into the grossest crimes. Demas has shewn us how awfully the most distinguished professors of religion may depart from God[g]: and in the thorny-ground hearers, we see how all the life of religion may be lost, whilst the outward form of it remains unaltered[h]. After our Lord's exhortation to his own Apostles, we may see that there is no sin whatever into which we may not fall, if we be for one moment left to the workings of our own evil hearts[i]. Indeed, independent of any gross sin to which we may be allured, the heart is of itself so indisposed to spiritual exercises, that it will soon faint and be weary in them, if its strength be not daily renewed by the Spirit of God. Hence that direction of the Apostle, "Be not weary in well-doing[k]."]

3. From the temptations of Satan—

[One of the first devices of Satan is, to persuade men that so much exertion in the divine life is not necessary; and, as he did respecting our Lord, he will instigate some friend to whisper in our ear, "Spare thyself." If he do not succeed in this way, he will suggest to us that our efforts are in vain; that we never were truly converted unto God; that we are not in the number of God's elect; that we have committed the unpardonable sin; and we had better secure the happiness that is within our reach, than labour for that which we can never obtain. Alas! how many has he deceived by these wiles, and ruined by these devices! Well then may we be on our guard against him, since we are told that "he is always walking

[d] Jam. iv. 4. [e] Gal. v. 17. [f] Rom. vii. 23.
[g] 2 Tim. iv. 10. [h] Matt. xiii. 22. [i] Luke xxi. 34.
[k] Gal. vi. 9.

walking about as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour." There had not been such armour provided for our use, if we had not a very arduous conflict to maintain[l].]

4. From the very members of the Church itself—

[St. Paul warned the Elders of Ephesus that they were in great "peril from false brethren;" and that not only from other quarters, but "even from among their own selves, some would arise, speaking perverse things, and drawing away disciples after them[m]." And who that is conversant with the Sacred Writings, or with the state of the Christian Church at this day, need be told what havoc false brethren have made, sometimes "subverting whole houses," and "bringing in damnable heresies, whereby they bring destruction both on themselves and multitudes of unsuspecting followers[n]." Even where persons do not go to these extremes, they may diffuse a vain, conceited and contentious spirit, and beguile to an awful extent the simple-hearted. We all know how easy it is to receive bad impressions; and how difficult to get rid of them, when once received. There is, if I may so call it, a virgin simplicity, which is the chief beauty and excellence of a Christian, and which, if once lost, is very hardly recovered; and to preserve it amongst a people, requires all the vigilance of the most active Minister, as well as all the caution of the people themselves[o].]

From contemplating the dangers of the Lord's people, we are naturally led to consider also,

II. The duties—

These are manifestly contained in the words of our text, partly by implication, and partly as directly expressed—

1. We should be aware of our danger—

[There is not any thing more prejudicial to the Christian than a presumptuous security: yet how extremely common is it in the Church of God! The professors of religion see, and condemn, this evil amongst their less-enlightened neighbours, and yet are unconscious of its existence in themselves. They even see it in each other; but almost every one conceives himself to be an exception from the rest: others may be ensnared by the world, or deceived by their own corrupt hearts, or beguiled by Satan, or drawn aside into some wrong sentiments or habits by their brethren; but *I* am clear; *I* am right; *I* am in no danger. But let all of us look back, and trace the workings of our own hearts, and we shall find reason to

[l] Eph. vi. 11, 12.
[m] Acts xx. 29, 30.
[n] 2 Pet. ii. 3. & iii. 17.
[o] 2 Cor. xi. 2, 3.

to acknowledge either that we have already, on many occasions, been impeded in our Christian course, or that, if we have not, it has been owing to the exceeding and abundant grace of God towards us. We should be deeply sensible of our own frailty; and should shun the means and occasions of sin, as much as sin itself. We should "not be high-minded, but fear;" and, "whilst we most think that we stand, we should take heed lest we fall." Not that it is desirable for any one to be brought into bondage, or to live under the influence of slavish fear: but, an humble filial fear is desirable at all times; such a fear, I mean, as drives us to the Lord for safety, and leads us to put our whole trust in him. In this sense, "blessed is the man that feareth alway."]

2. We should have a fixed and determined purpose to cleave unto the Lord"—

[Let me not be misunderstood, as if I would recommend any one to make resolutions in his own strength: the example of Peter may shew us the folly of such confidence: he who one hour declared that he would sooner die with Christ than deny him, denied him the next hour with oaths and curses. But in the Lord's strength we may, and must resolve. "My heart is fixed, my heart is fixed, I will sing and give praise unto the Lord," was a resolution worthy to be formed; as was that also of Joshua, that though all Israel should depart from God, "he and his house would serve the Lord." Indeed without such a fixed purpose of heart, we shall become the sport of every temptation. We must determine, through grace, that we will be faithful to our God; that neither the allurements of life, nor the terrors of death, shall induce us to turn aside from following him. We must keep our eye single in this respect: we must have one object, and one alone, in view: to honour God must be the one aim of our lives. In relation to this, we must maintain with equal firmness the principles and the practice of Christianity: we must "hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering," and "be stedfast, unmoveable, and always abounding in the work of the Lord."]

"Suffer ye then a word of EXHORTATION"—

[That the subject is deserving of your deepest attention, cannot be doubted: the character given of Barnabas, in the words following our text, is a pledge of it; "He was a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost and of faith." He was "a son of consolation;" and therefore we may be sure he did not needlessly endeavour to distress the souls of any: yet he exhorted *all* without exception, because *all* are in danger of falling, and of "making shipwreck of the faith." Consider

then, Beloved, what obligations you are under to cleave unto the Lord. Has he so highly favoured you with tokens of his love and mercy, that you should forsake him at last? Has our blessed Saviour shed his blood for you, that you should "tread him under your feet," by relapsing into sin? Has the Holy Spirit enlightened, quickened, sanctified you, that you should "do despite to him," and "quench" his sacred motions? Have you "found God a wilderness to you," that you should desert him, and go back again to the world for happiness? Is it wise to "leave the fountain for broken cisterns?" Is it likely to make you happier even in this world; and, if not, how much less will it do so in the world to come? Did you never read, that they who turn back "turn back unto perdition," and that "God's soul can have no pleasure in them?" Be on your guard then, ere it be too late. But if any will not take warning, I shall conclude my address to them with the solemn declaration of Moses, just before his death; "I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore choose life, that ye may live, and that ye may love the Lord your God, and *cleave* unto him; for HE is your life, and the length of your days[p]."]

[p] Deut. xxx. 19, 20.

DCCCLXX.

BENEVOLENCE OF THE CHURCH OF ANTIOCH.

Acts xi. 29, 30. *Then the Disciples, every man according to his ability, determined to send relief unto the Brethren which dwelt in Judea: which also they did, and sent it to the Elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul.*

GOD is love; and all who have been truly taught of God, are transformed into his image: their selfish passions are in a good measure subdued; and their delight is in the exercise of the most benevolent affections. To such an extent was the principle of love carried by the first converts, that the rich parted with their estates and goods, to form one common stock for the subsistence of the whole Church, thereby reducing themselves to a level with the poorest of their Brethren.* The Church of Antioch also were very exemplary in their exercise of this grace. They were informed by prophecy, that there would,

would, ere long, be a famine throughout all the Roman empire: and therefore, concluding that the pressure would be particularly felt by their Brethren at Jerusalem, where there were none able to succour their distressed neighbours, on account of the voluntary poverty they had brought upon themselves, they raised a collection, and sent it to the Elders of that Church, who, from their knowledge of the various individuals, might dispose of their alms to the greatest possible advantage.

This benevolence of theirs shall be the subject of our present discourse. We will,

I. Contemplate it for your instruction—

In the account of it which is here given us, there are two things to be noticed;

1. The occasion that called it forth—

[A prophet, named Agabus, foretold a famine which should involve the whole Roman empire in extreme distress: and, as he had recently come from Jerusalem, it is probable that he stated some circumstances in relation to the Church in that place, which would occasion the affliction to be felt there with more than ordinary severity. Immediately the Church at Antioch, feeling their obligations to those at Jerusalem, to whom they were indebted for all the spiritual benefits they enjoyed, and justly conceiving that this was a peculiarly proper season for requiting them with temporal benefits, which on account of their comparative opulence they were able to do, immediately raised a collection among themselves, for the relief of their Brethren at Jerusalem when the season of their trial should arrive.

Now from hence we learn some very important lessons; the first of which is, *That every word of God should be regarded by us as a ground of action.* The event predicted did not come to pass for some years; yet was the provision made for it instantaneously, as much as if it had existed at that very moment. The prediction itself was to them a sufficient pledge that the season would arrive, whether at an earlier or more remote period: the times and seasons were in God's hands; but their duty was to provide for the occasion before hand; and therefore they exerted themselves without delay. How happy would it be for us, if we regarded every declaration of God with similar awe and reverence! O let us not think that remoteness of time will make any difference as to the certainty of future events; for every thing that God has spoken

spoken in reference to the eternal world, will as certainly take place, as if the events were close at hand; and it is our duty now to act, as if we were assured that a few hours only would intervene between the prediction and the accomplishment.

Another lesson which their conduct teaches us is, *That benevolence is essential to the Christian character.* Their benevolence was altogether spontaneous, the effect of a principle universally operative among them. That principle is altogether inseparable from the Christian character; for, "if we love not our brother whom we have seen, how can we love God whom we have not seen?" We should consider "all, but especially the household of faith," as "Brethren;" and should regard our property as a talent committed to us by our common Father, for the benefit of the whole family. "We should not seek our own things, but the things which are Jesus Christ's"———]

2. The manner in which it was exercised—

[Behold their *zeal! all* were animated by the same spirit; and "every one" exerted himself "*according to his ability.*" Had they been disposed to indulge a selfish spirit, they might have found excuses enough for withholding present supplies. "The occasion had not yet arrived: they themselves would be subject to the same calamity, and were more bound to provide for their immediate neighbours than for others at the distance of several hundred miles." But they listened not to any such suggestions: it was sufficient for them that an opportunity had occurred for the exercise of love, and for the honouring of their Lord; and therefore they improved it instantly to the utmost of their power. Thus also should *we:* "Whatsoever our hand findeth to do, we should do it with our might:" and especially in administering relief to the Lord's people, we should not estimate our liberality by the mere amount of our donations, so much as by our ability to give; since in God's sight the widow, with her two mites, gave more than all the rich, who, out of their abundance, had cast large sums into the treasury.

We admire too their *prudence.* They could not themselves go to Jerusalem to inspect the state of the Church, and administer relief with their own hands; they therefore sent their money to the Elders of that Church, who, by their local knowledge, were qualified, and by their exalted piety were disposed, to dispense the alms in the most equitable and effectual manner. In this also they have left us a very instructive lesson, to attend with the utmost care to the manner in which we dispose of our alms: for, as the withholding of alms is sinful economy, so indiscreet charity is criminal profuseness.]

Without

Without stopping to multiply lessons of instruction from their benevolence, we will now,

II. Propose it for your imitation—

We have at this time,

1. A *similar occasion* for benevolence—

[* * *[a]]

2. SIMILAR MEANS of exercising it—

[They committed to the Elders of the Church at Jerusalem the task of selecting the objects, and apportioning the alms; and thankfully availed themselves of the labours of others, to carry into effect their benevolent designs. Now amongst us there are many united into a society, for the express purpose of finding out the wants of the poor, and of administering also to their spiritual necessities[b]: whatever, therefore, your liberality shall contribute, will be disposed of by them to much better effect than if you were to bestow your alms upon the poor with your own hands, unless you could at the same time inquire into all the circumstances of their different cases, and stop to unite spiritual instruction with your temporal relief. These persons, like the Elders at Jerusalem, cannot, out of their own funds, do good to any great extent; nor would their visits be well received by the poor, if they tendered nothing but good advice: but, when they can impart also some relief for the body, they are more kindly welcomed as instructors for the soul: the hearts, as well as the houses, of the poor are easier of access, when the way is smoothed by "a gift in the bosom."]

3. *Similar obligations* to exercise it—

[They felt the force of redeeming love; and judged that they administered to Christ himself, whilst they relieved him in his distressed members. And are these motives to benevolence lessened by the lapse of time? Are not we as much bound to devote ourselves, and all that we have, to Christ, as they could be? In some respects, our obligations to exert ourselves are greater than theirs: for the sole object of *their* benevolence was, to bestow *temporal* relief; whereas *that*, though an important, is a subordinate, consideration with *us*, who aim principally at promoting the *eternal* welfare of our fellow-creatures. If then we profess to love the Lord Jesus Christ, let us now approve our love to him, by our zealous exertions, and liberal contributions.]

* * *[a] Here state the particular occasion; suppose, for *a Benevolent Society*; viz. the pressure of the times, the want especially in time of sickness, and, *above all, the need of spiritual instruction and consolation*, which are of infinitely greater value than any temporal benefits whatever.

[b] Here state how they conduct their affairs.

DCCCLXXI.

PETER'S DELIVERANCE FROM PRISON.

Acts xii. 5. *Peter therefore was kept in prison: but prayer was made without ceasing of the Church unto God for him.*

THE Scriptures inform us, that "God's counsel shall stand, and that he will do all his pleasure." Let the combinations against him be ever so formidable, the ultimate issue of the contest is certain[a]. Whatever circumstances therefore we may be in, we may safely commit our cause to him with confidence and composure[b]. We cannot conceive a finer illustration of this subject, than that which is contained in the account of Peter's deliverance from prison.

Let us make some observations upon,

I. His danger—

This was imminent indeed; whether we consider,

1. The crime of which he was accused—

[Had he been guilty of sedition or murder? No. What then had he done that had incensed Herod, and rendered his apprehension and death a subject of universal satisfaction? He had preached the Gospel with indefatigable zeal, and had laboured to convert both Jews and Gentiles to the knowledge of Christ. This was an offence that could not be expiated, but by his blood. All that had preceded him in the same path from the beginning of the world, had incurred the resentment of their contemporaries; and, almost without exception, had suffered death for their fidelity; as Abel, and all the Prophets, abundantly testify. And we cannot but wonder, that, when persons are hated, reviled, and persecuted, simply for righteousness' sake, (as thousands in this day are, as well as in former times,) it does not immediately occur to their persecutors, that these very sufferings are *a testimony in their favour*[c]; inasmuch as they mark a close resemblance between *them*, and the persecuted saints of old. But as long as "men love darkness rather than light," they will hate, and extinguish too if they can, the light that shines around them.]

2. The state to which he was reduced—

[He was in prison, chained to two soldiers, (one on either hand,) and guarded by sixteen, four of them at a time. His friends, though numerous, had no power to rescue him; nor had

[a] Ps. ii. 4—6. [b] Ps. xi. 1—4. [c] Luke xxi. 13.

had he any in Herod's court to intercede for him. Nor was there now time for any favourable occurrences to arise; for this was his very last night; and on the morrow he was to be brought forth for public execution: and all his own countrymen were anxiously waiting for the last tragical scene, and hoping within a few hours to feast their eyes with his blood. —What hope then remained for him? Die he must: nor did there appear the smallest prospect, but that the fate which had already removed James, awaited him.]

But "what is impossible with man, is possible with God;" as we see in,

II. His deliverance—

Mark *the means* used for his deliverance—

[From human interference there was no hope: but the poor trembling Disciples did not yet despair: they knew that "whereinsoever the enemies of the Church might deal proudly, God was above them." To God therefore they addressed themselves with redoubled importunity: and continued all night in unceasing prayer for him. What foolish means would these appear to those who knew how closely he was guarded, and how determinately both Herod and the Jews were bent upon his death!—But, if God be omnipotent, prayer, which interests God for us, may be called omnipotent also. What has it not done? It has opened and shut the heavens; vanquished armies; saved kingdoms; raised the dead;—and it has an express promise from God, that, whatever the subject of it be, (provided it be agreeable to his will,) the requests urged by two or three, with united faith and fervour, shall certainly be granted.

O that *we*, as individuals, as a Church, as a nation, did but justly appreciate the power of prayer! how safe should we be from enemies, and how happy under the protection of our God! ———]

See also *the manner* in which he was delivered—

[God heard the supplications of his people; and marked, by the very time and manner of his interposition, what it was that prevailed for his deliverance. Access to Peter, though barred with respect to men, was as open as ever to God; and to angels, as his ministering servants. God therefore sent an angel to effect his deliverance: and behold, how speedily the work was done! the chains fell off his hands; the keepers and soldiers were constrained in some way or other, so that they could make no resistance; and the iron gate that entered into the city, opened to them of its own accord. So surprising was this deliverance, that Peter himself could not conceive it to be true, but thought it was all passing in a mere vision.

vision. And, when he went to the house where the people were praying for him, and the damsel who kept the door affirmed that it was Peter who stood knocking at the door, and that she knew his voice, they told her she was mad: and when they could not silence her positive assertions, they said, "It must be his angel." Had they duly considered, they would have seen that he was expressly given to their prayers; and that God had fulfilled to them his own gracious promise, that "before they called he would answer, and, while they were yet speaking, he would hear[d]" ———]

We may LEARN from hence,

1. The blessedness of serving God—

[It may appear at first, that there is no inference less deducible from the subject than this: for, is there any blessedness in imprisonment, and bonds, and death? But look at Peter on the very night previous to his intended execution: he is sleeping as soundly as if no evil whatever awaited him; insomuch that the extraordinary light which shone into the prison did not interrupt his slumbers; nor did he awake, till "the angel smote him on the side." Behold too the interposition of God for him! Was an angel wanted to liberate him from prison? an angel is sent from heaven on purpose; and soldiers, chains, bars, gates, have no longer any power to confine him. Surely then, if to enjoy such composure in the immediate prospect of death, and such protection from God when all human help has failed, be blessed, it is blessed to serve our God, who vouchsafes such mercies to his faithful people ——— Be not ye afraid then of the frowns of men: but fear God, who is alike able to save or to destroy ——— Seek your happiness in doing the Divine will; and then you may safely commit your every concern to him, knowing, that if God be for you, none can, with any effect, exert themselves against you ———]

2. The efficacy of united prayer—

[Prayer may appear for a time to be offered in vain: "God may bear long with his people," even when they are most importunate. But we must not mistake delays for denials: "God has never said to any, Seek ye my face in vain." Circumstances may arise, wherein it will be more for the good even of the Church itself that prayer should not be answered precisely in the way that we might wish. This doubtless was the case with respect to James, whose fortitude in suffering martyrdom was more useful to the Church than his continued labours would have been. But where any matter will really issue in God's glory and the Church's good, we may

[d] Isai. lxv. 24. See a similar instance, Dan. ix. 20, 21, 23.

may ask for it with an absolute assurance that it shall be granted. No nation since the establishment of Christianity ever enjoyed greater mercies from God than ours: and if we knew the history of it as it is recorded in heaven, I doubt not but that the prayers of God's people would be found to have wrought more for us, than all our fleets and armies have ever done. Let all of us then give ourselves unto prayer in our secret chambers: let Societies for prayer be established; and those which already exist carry on their united efforts with unceasing ardour. Let us not be contented with a brief mention of our necessities to God, but plead earnestly with him for the relief of them, and "give him no rest, till he arise and make our Jerusalem a praise in the earth."]

DCCCLXXII.

THE EVIL OF PRIDE.

Acts xii. 21—23. *And upon a set day, Herod, arrayed in royal apparel, sat upon his throne, and made an oration unto them. And the people gave a shout, saying, It is the voice of a god, and not of a man. And immediately the angel of the Lord smote him, because he gave not God the glory. And he was eaten up of worms, and gave up the Ghost.*

IN almost all the instances of judicial punishment recorded in Scripture, we see a remarkable correspondence between the punishment, and the sin on account of which it was inflicted: and it seems to be especially designed of God, in order that he might be the more manifestly "known in the judgments which he executeth." In the passage before us, we are informed, that Herod was greatly offended with the people of Tyre and Sidon; but, at the intercession of his own chamberlain, he forgave them. On this occasion he delivered to them an oration, probably in part at least on the subject of his own clemency: and they, struck with the splendor of his appearance, and perhaps with the force of his eloquence, or, more probably, desiring to conciliate him by flattery, exclaimed, that the voice which they heard was the voice of a god rather than a man. With these plaudits Herod was highly gratified: and instantly God, by the instrumentality of an angel, smote him with a disease in his bowels, so acute

acute and terrible, that, as the Jewish Historian informs us, he was constrained to acknowledge before that very assembly, that God had punished him for not rejecting with abhorrence their impious acclamations, and that they would soon see an end of their *god*. Accordingly, the worms that were thus formed in his body, preyed upon his vitals, and devoured him in the space of about five days: so that his degradation was as manifest as his pride had been presumptuous.

We propose to consider more fully,

I. His sin—

Whether the excellence of his oration was real or imaginary, his crime was the same; "He gave not God the glory of it." Now this is, in truth, as common a sin as any that can be named: for where is there a person possessed of either natural endowments, or acquired distinctions, who does not pride himself in them, instead of giving the glory of them to the Lord? The female thinks but little of God, when her beauty is admired; or the man, when he is celebrated for his strength and valour. The man of learning, or of skill in arts, or who has advanced himself by successful industry to great opulence, readily accepts the adulation paid to his talents and success; little thinking that it is "God alone who has made him to differ" from others, or "given him the power to get wealth." Perhaps the generality will allow this to be an infirmity incident to our nature; but few, if any, conceive of it as an heinous sin; whereas it is, in reality, a sin of great magnitude. It is,

1. A denial of God's goodness—

[God is "the Author of every good and perfect gift," in creation, in providence, and in grace. Whatever we possess, we must say with the Apostle, "He that hath wrought us for this self-same thing, is God[a]." If any person have a right to ascribe glory to himself, methinks it is the conqueror, whose valour overcomes his enemy: but God in a particular manner charged his people, when they should be brought into the quiet possession of the land of Canaan, not to imagine

[a] 2 Cor. v. 5.

gine that "their power, or the might of their hand, had gotten them that wealth," but to acknowledge it all as given them by their God[b]. When therefore we withhold these acknowledgments, we do, in fact, deny that they are due to God, and impiously assume to ourselves the honour that is due to him alone. In a word, we tread in the very steps of Herod, and commit the sin which brought on him such tokens of God's displeasure.]

2. An invasion of his prerogative—

["God has made all things *for himself*:" and "his glory he will not give to another." But, if we take to ourselves the glory which is due to him, we put ourselves, as it were, into his place, and become a god unto ourselves. This may appear too strong a representation; but it is the very construction which Jehovah himself puts upon such conduct. The city of Tyre was greatly enriched, and raised to a high rank among the surrounding nations: and the Governors, instead of acknowledging the providence of God in their elevation, ascribed it wholly to themselves, and confided in it as a source of continued security. Hear now how God speaks to them respecting it: "Son of man, say unto the Prince of Tyrus, Thus saith the Lord God; Because thine heart is lifted up, and thou hast said, 'I am God, I sit in the seat of God, in the midst of the seas;' yet thou art a man, and not God, though thou set thine heart as the heart of God[c]." Nor let it be imagined that this is done only by an actual assumption of these honours to ourselves: Herod did not *claim* the honours that were ascribed to him; but he was *pleased with* them; and *acquiesced in* their judgment, instead of reproving it. Paul and Barnabas, when divine honours were offered to them, rent their clothes, and ran in among the people, and expostulated with them in the strongest terms[d]: and it was Herod's sin, that he accepted the flattery, instead of reprobating it with indignation. In like manner the receiving with complacency the flattering unction of human applause, trifling as it may appear to us, is a very heinous sin in the sight of God.]

The evil of his sin may be further seen in the greatness of,

II. His punishment—

Pride, above all things, provokes "a jealous God:" and the whole creation are ready to vindicate the honour of his injured Majesty. As, in the plagues of

[b] Deut. viii. 7, 11—14, 18, 19.
[c] Ezek. xxviii. 2—10. Compare also Hab. i. 15, 16.
[d] Acts xiv. 9—15.

of Egypt, frogs and lice were ready to inflict punishment on the hardened monarch, so, in Herod's case, "worms" sprang forth, as it were, into existence, to avenge the quarrel of Jehovah. Nor shall such an impious disposition ever pass unpunished.

1. God has punished it in many instances—

[See where man has made himself *the author* of the great things which have been wrought by him; how strongly has God resented it[e]! ——— See where man has made himself *the end* of his own actions; how fearfully has God manifested his indignation against the offending person[f]! ——— See where only *an undue complacency* has been felt, as arising from the possession of the things which God himself has given; even *that* has excited great displeasure in the breast of the Almighty, and caused him to inflict the heaviest judgments[g] ———]

2. He will punish it wherever it is indulged—

[If such a disposition be habitually indulged, God regards it as a proof of hypocrisy[h]: and, though he is ever ready to give grace to the humble, he will assuredly resist, and abase, the proud[i] ——— Though it break not forth into gross inconsistencies of conduct, yet, if it be harboured in the heart, we shall be held in utter abomination in the sight of God[k] ———]

REFLECTIONS—

1. What need have we to watch the motions of our hearts!

[God looks at the heart, and "searches it," and sees every thought of it[l], and puts the true construction upon every motion of it, and will call us into judgment for all its most secret imaginations[m]. Alas! how many proud, conceited, self-complacent thoughts has he there beheld! Do we not then need to humble ourselves before him, and to "pray, that the thoughts of our hearts may be forgiven us[n]?" ———]

2. How careful should we be of using any flattering words!

[Men flatter others because they know that flattery is pleasant to the carnal mind: but it is that very pleasure which offends God, and brings down his judgments on the soul. How cruel then is it to expose a brother to such danger!

[e] Isai. x. 12—15. & xxxvii. 23—29. [f] Dan. iv. 30—33.
[g] Isai. xxxix. 3—7. with 2 Chron. xxxii. 25, 26.
[h] Hab. ii. 4. [i] Jam. iv. 6. Dan. iv. 37. [k] Prov. xvi. 5.
[l] Ezek. xi. 5. [m] 1 Cor. iv. 5. [n] Acts viii. 22.

danger! Would we put poison into his hands just to gratify his palate, when we knew that it would speedily put an end to his existence? How then can we seek to gratify his mind at the expense of his soul? This is a thought peculiarly important for those who hear the Gospel faithfully administered: they are apt to forget that Ministers are men of like passions with themselves; and that God particularly forbad that a novice should be admitted into the Ministry, "lest, being lifted up with pride, he should fall into the condemnation of the devil." Bear in mind, Brethren, that flattery is an ordeal which few can bear[o]; and that he who makes use of it, "spreads a net for his brother's feet[p]."]

[o] Prov. xxvii. 1. [p] Prov. xxix. 5.

DCCCLXXIII.

ELYMAS THE SORCERER STRUCK BLIND.

Acts xiii. 9—11. *Then Saul (who is also called Paul,) filled with the Holy Ghost, set his eyes on him, and said, O full of all subtlety and all mischief, thou child of the devil, thou enemy of all righteousness, wilt thou not cease to pervert the right ways of the Lord? And now, behold, the hand of the Lord is upon thee; and thou shalt be blind, not seeing the sun for a season.*

IN general, the duty of Ministers is to "have compassion on them that are ignorant and out of the way," and to "instruct in meekness them that oppose themselves: but there are occasions whereon it is necessary for them to "rebuke men sharply," and with all authority. We do not indeed think that it would be proper for an uninspired Minister to use exactly the language of our text, because he could not tell what measure of impiety existed in the mind of the person reproved: but, whether inspired or not inspired, it becomes every servant of God to make a firm stand against infidelity and impiety, and to declare without reserve the judgments of God against the enemies of his Gospel. St. Paul was certainly under no bad impression when he addressed Elymas; for, it is said, he was "filled with the Holy Ghost: and under the influence of that same blessed Spirit we may speak with all boldness, and yet not violate, in any degree, the decorum or the charity which our office requires.

In

In the address before us, we notice,

I. The true character of the Gospel—

None of the Inspired Writers ever spoke in a doubting manner respecting the truth or excellence of the Gospel: convinced in their own minds, they uniformly spake with the decision that became them. St. Paul here calls the Gospel "the right ways of the Lord:" and this is indeed its proper character; for it contains the only right way,

1. Of seeking his favour—

[It offers salvation freely through the blood and righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ———It requires nothing in those to whom it is offered, but an humble sense of their own guilt and misery, and an entire surrender of themselves to him, to be washed in his blood, and to be sanctified by his grace.

This is the "right way" of seeking favour with God. All the ways of man's devising are delusory. Not only is all hope of "establishing a righteousness of our own" vain, but even the smallest attempt to blend any thing of our own with his meritorious death and sacrifice will deceive us[a]——— Salvation must be of grace, from first to last[b]———]

2. Of glorifying his name—

[The Gospel calls us to a life of universal holiness[c]; and requires us to "live, not unto ourselves, but unto Him who died for us, and rose again[d]."

And this also is exclusively the "right way" of serving God. If we imagine that a barren unproductive faith will suffice, we shall find ourselves fatally mistaken. Nor will a partial obedience to God's will be accepted: his law, his whole law, must be written in our hearts, and exemplified in our lives. A wilful retaining of a single lust would prove as fatal to us, as a rejection of his Gospel altogether[e]———]

The attempts of Elymas to "pervert" the Gospel lead us to consider,

II. The opposition it meets with—

We are not now called to speak of persecution, but only of those arts which were used by this malignant

[a] Rom. x. 3, 4. [b] Eph. ii. 8, 9. [c] Tit. ii. 11, 12.
[d] Rom. xiv. 7—9. [e] Matt. v. 29, 30.
[f] 2 Tim. iii. 8. & iv. 14, 15.

lignant sorcerer. We doubt not then but that he withstood the Apostles,

1. By subtle disputations—

[As a Jew, he would bring forward all the arguments he could against Christianity itself. And such opposers are still found amongst those who "name the name of Christ." There are infidels who deride Christianity as much as the most inveterate Jew could do. But where the Gospel is admitted as true, the fundamental doctrines of it are not uncommonly assailed with all the powers of reason. The total depravity of our nature, the truth and efficacy of Christ's atonement, the influences of the Holy Spirit, and the necessity of an entire surrender of ourselves to God, are all denied; and a religion little better than Heathen morality is substituted in the place of that which Christ has revealed. He must be a stranger indeed in our Jerusalem, who does not know how fiercely even the first principle of the Gospel, the doctrine of salvation by faith in Christ, is decried——— The sons of Jannes and Jambres, and of Alexander the coppersmith, are as subtle and malignant as ever their fathers were———]

2. By base calumnies—

[We can have no doubt but that Elymas would endeavour to discredit the testimony of Paul and Barnabas by evil insinuations against their character and designs; nor would he fail to load their doctrine also with all the reproaches which Jewish malignity could suggest. And are not these weapons still used against the Gospel? Are not the preachers of it represented as "the troublers of Israel," as "deceivers," as "turning the world upside down?" Are they not often spoken of as crafty men, who in their hearts are adverse to the Civil and Ecclesiastical Establishments of the land wherein they dwell? Is not their doctrine traduced precisely as in the days of old? St. Paul's complaint was, "We be slanderously reported, and some affirm that we say, Let us do evil, that good may come:" and for the same complaint there is abundant occasion, wherever the Gospel is faithfully preached: nor can any better answer be made to our accusers than Paul himself made, namely, that "their damnation is just[g]." Indeed it is not possible for any one to embrace the truth in sincerity, without becoming an object for the envenomed shafts of slander: and it is worthy of observation, that, as this treatment is experienced by those *universally* who preach or profess the Gospel, so it is experienced by them *exclusively*: a man may preach or profess what else he will, and yet be at peace with the world: but the moment he

[g] Rom. iii. 8.

he becomes a decided follower of Christ, a warfare is commenced against him, even by his nearest relatives; yea "his greatest foes are generally those of his own household."]

In the Apostle's answer, however, we observe,

III. The evil and danger of opposing it—

The *evil* of it is marked *in the terms which the Apostle used*—

[We will grant that there was in Elymas a peculiar malignity of character, which justified the severity of St. Paul's address; and that the same severity would not be just, if used against many who oppose the Gospel: but still, in proportion as our character or conduct resembles that of Elymas, the terms in which he was addressed may be applied to us.

It is a fact, that the greater part of those who raise up opposition to the Gospel, are men of a subtle and mischievous disposition: and it is equally true, that they act under the immediate influence of Satan[h]. Now the great employment of Satan is, to blind men's eyes, so that they may not see the Gospel; precisely as the great office of the Holy Spirit is, to open men's eyes, that they may behold it[i]: and, consequently, in doing Satan's work, they approve themselves his children[k]. And are they not in this "enemies of all righteousness?" Where is any true righteousness to be found, but among those who embrace the Gospel? Look at the life of Christ and his Apostles, and see, if any thing like it ever was produced under the influence of false religion? It is a curious fact, that they who are most adverse to the principles of the Gospel, are always complaining, that its friends are too strict, and too precise, and "righteous over-much;" and thus they shew themselves enemies no less to the holiness of the Gospel, than to its free and full salvation.

How great then must be the evil of a conduct which entails on us such epithets as these!]

The *danger* of it is marked *in the judgment he denounced*—

[God smote this malicious adversary with blindness, agreeably to the declaration of St. Paul: and this blindness was an awful emblem of the blindness of his soul. We do not indeed expect that the enemies of the Gospel shall now receive such open demonstrations of God's displeasure; (though we are far from thinking that such judgments are never executed:) but we are sure that spiritual blindness is the common fruit of hostility to the Gospel; and that they who labour to blind others, can expect nothing but to be blinded

[h] Eph. ii. 2. [i] 2 Cor. iv. 4, 6.
[k] John viii. 44.

blinded themselves[l]. The blindness of Elymas was inflicted only "for a season," that he might repent, and "recover himself out of the snare of the devil, by whom he was led captive at his will:" and in like manner there is yet space given for repentance, even to the most inveterate opposers of the Gospel: but if they do not speedily acknowledge their guilt, they have reason to fear that ere long they will be given over to final impenitence, and their present blindness be succeeded by "the blackness of darkness for ever[m]."]

ADDRESS,

1. Those who are inquiring after truth—

[Of Sergius Paulus it is said, "He was a prudent man;" and "he called for Barnabas and Saul, and desired to hear the word of God." Moreover, when he had heard it, he disregarded all the attempts of Elymas to pervert it, and himself became an avowed disciple of Christ. This was a conduct worthy of him, and worthy to be pursued by every wise and "*prudent*" man. We earnestly recommend it then to all to follow his example. *Be diligent in inquiring*, and avail yourselves of every opportunity of gaining instruction in the religion of Christ ——— *Be candid in judging*, and do not suffer yourselves to be prejudiced by the scoffs or calumnies of the unbelieving world ——— *Be firm* also *in acting:* do not be afraid of following the convictions of your own conscience; or think, that your being in a place of great power and authority will be any excuse for not obeying its voice: it is rather a reason why you should be the more bold for the Lord, because you may influence so many more by your example. Had this Roman Governor put off his convictions, like Felix, he would probably have been left to perish in his sins: but now he enjoys, in all its richness, the truth he embraced. Know then, that ye likewise will soon receive the final recompence of your conduct; in happiness, if faithful to your convictions; but in misery inexpressible, if you dissemble with God.]

2. Those who are opposing it—

[Greatly is it to be regretted that the Gospel has still its adversaries, and that persons in authority are peculiarly beset with them. Satan knows how extensive is the influence of the great: and therefore he sends forth his emissaries, to encompass them around, and to prejudice their minds against the faith of Christ. But be it known to all, that Christ will triumph at last, and that "his enemies ere long shall surely become his footstool." By some it may be thought a light

[l] Isai. vi. 9, 10. with Mark iv. 11, 12.
[m] Isai. xxviii. 22. & Jude, ver. 11, 13.

light matter to dispute against the Gospel, and to obstruct its influence on the minds of men: but our Lord has told us, that "it were better for us that a millstone should be put round our necks, and that we should be cast into the midst of the sea, than that we should offend one of his little ones." Let those then who will not embrace the Gospel, beware how they labour to pervert the faith of others: if they must perish, they had better perish alone, than under the guilt of destroying the souls of others. But let us hope, that those who have acted thus as Satan's instruments, will do so no more; but that rather their own eyes shall be opened, and that they will embrace the faith which they have endeavoured to destroy. If however any will persist in their impiety, let them tell us what are those ways which *they* call "right;" and let their principles be compared with those of the Apostle. We fear not the issue, if only this comparison be made: we have no doubt but that the Gospel only contains the "*right* ways of the Lord," and that those only who embrace and walk in them will ever enter into life.]

DCCCLXXIV.

DANGER OF DESPISING THE GOSPEL SALVATION.

Acts xiii. 38—41. *Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins; and by him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses. Beware therefore, lest that come upon you which is spoken of in the Prophets; Behold, ye despisers, and wonder, and perish: for I work a work in your days, a work which ye shall in no wise believe, though a man declare it unto you.*

NO one can read the New Testament with attention, without seeing that there is one point to which all the discourses of the Apostles tend, namely, the exhibition of Christ as the Saviour of the world. In Him all the lines meet, as in their common centre. The discourses of St. Paul embraced the whole circle of Divine truth; yet he justly says, that "he determined to know nothing among his converts but Jesus Christ, and him crucified." In the chapter before us is contained his address to the Jews in a synagogue at Antioch. He begins with a subject ever gratifying to a Jewish ear, a rehearsal of the distinguished mercies vouchsafed to that nation from the time

time of their departure out of Egypt to the time of David, from whose seed they all acknowledged that their Messiah should spring. He then declares, that that Messiah was come, even Jesus, in whom the prophecies had been literally fulfilled, both in the peculiar manner of his death, and in his resurrection from the dead. He then comes to apply the subject to their hearts and consciences, combining all the tenderness of a brother with all the fidelity of an Apostle. In opening to you that part which we have just read, we shall notice,

I. The declaration made—

It had been said by our Lord after his resurrection, that "repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations[a]." And here St. Paul, executing his commission, declares that this way of salvation was,

1. Divinely appointed—

[There is no doubt or hesitation to be seen in his mode of expressing this truth: on the contrary, he speaks with most assured confidence; "Be it known to you, Brethren, that through this man is the forgiveness of sins:" Be it known, that his death was a propitiation for sin,—that by that sacrifice, Divine justice has been satisfied,—that through it God is reconciled to a guilty world,—and that he has committed to us the ministry of reconciliation, and sent us on purpose to preach to you the forgiveness of your sins in his name[b].—These are truths of infinite importance to every Child of man; and we declare them without even a shadow of doubt upon our own minds; and desire that they may be embraced by you with the fullest assurance of your minds, and the liveliest gratitude of your souls[c].

Beloved Brethren, we announce the same glorious truths to you. Who amongst you is not a sinner before God? Who does not need such a Saviour? Who has not reason to leap for joy at having such a method of forgiveness proposed to him? Know ye then, that "to *you* is the word of this salvation sent[d];" and "we, as God's Ambassadors, pray you in Christ's stead, Be ye reconciled to God[e]."

2. Universally effectual—

[There is no distinction now made between Jews and Gentiles:

[a] Luke xxiv. 47. [b] 2 Cor. v. 18, 19. [c] 1 Tim. i. 15.
[d] ver. 26. [e] 2 Cor. v. 20.

tiles: the word is no longer confined to one age or country; "it is gone forth unto the ends of the world." Nor is there now any distinction of sins, as far as relates to the forgiveness of them through the blood of Christ. Under the law, there were many sins for which no sacrifice whatever could be accepted. The adulterer and the murderer, for instance, were left without any means of pardon provided for them by the law: nor was any presumptuous sin to be reckoned among those for which sacrifices were appointed[f]. But under the Gospel there is no exception whatever: "All manner of sin shall be forgiven unto men," provided they repent of it, and believe in Jesus Christ for the remission of it: and, if the sin against the Holy Ghost be excepted, it is not because the blood of Christ would not cleanse from that, as well as from every other, but because the man who has committed it must have arrived at such a degree of blindness and obduracy, that he never will repent of his iniquity, nor ever look to Christ with sincerity of heart for the remission of it. We confidently declare, that sins even of a scarlet or crimson dye shall be forgiven[g]; yea, we declare that every sin we have ever committed *is* actually forgiven, the very instant we truly believe in Christ: even "the little children in Christ" may glory in this, as a truth on which they may most confidently rely, that on their believing in Christ, they not only *shall be*, but actually, as our text expresses it, "*are* justified from all things[h]."]

To impress this blessed truth the more deeply on your minds, let us consider,

II. The admonition with which it is enforced—

Glorious as this salvation is, it is too generally despised—

[All the Prophets prophesied respecting it with more or less clearness[i]; but all had reason to complain, "Who hath believed our report[k]?" In the days of the Apostles the same complaint was made[l]: and it may but too justly be repeated by us at this day. If this be doubted, let any man tell us, Where "has the offence of the cross ceased?" Where is not the faithful exhibition of a crucified Saviour derided as enthusiasm? and in what place are not the followers of Christ gazed upon "as signs and wonders?"———But it is not the infidel only or the scoffer that despises Christ: for every man is *guilty* of despising him, who complies not with the invitations of his Gospel, and withholds from him the affections of his heart. O let us examine ourselves carefully on this

[f] Numb. xv. 30. with ver. 39. of the text.
[g] Isai. i. 18. Ps. li. 7. [h] Col. ii. 13. 1 John ii. 12.
[i] Acts x. 43. [k] Isai. liii. 1. [l] Rom. x. 16.

this head, and see whether the warning in our text may not justly be applied to us — — —]

If we be found among the number of his despisers, woe be to us—

[The Jews of old despised both the mercies and the judgments of their God: and the prophet Habakkuk, expostulating with them, declared, that God would inflict on them such judgments by the hands of the Chaldeans, as they would not credit, however strongly his determination should be announced[m]. St. Paul declares, that similar judgments awaited the Jews of his day; and warns them against bringing on themselves such heavy calamities[n]. But what are the calamities inflicted by the Chaldeans or Romans in comparison of those which await Unbelievers in the eternal world? We declare to men, that God has wrought the most stupendous work of mercy in the redemption of the world by his dear Son, and that he will consign over to everlasting misery all who reject his Gospel: but men will not believe either the one or the other of these things: they will not so believe his promises as to seek an interest in them; nor will they so believe his threatenings as to endeavour to escape them. But as the judgments denounced against the Jews in former ages have come upon them, so will the judgments denounced against us. Methinks it were sufficient to hear God so strongly assert this, as he does in many places[o]: but God condescends to appeal to us, and to make us judges in our own cause: "What shall the end be of them that obey not the Gospel of Christ?" "How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation?" "He that depised Moses' law died without mercy: of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God?" Can we hear such appeals, and not see the need of attending to the admonition in the text? O let us "*beware*," how we reject or slight the salvation now offered us. Let us "*beware*" lest we bring upon ourselves that "wrath and fiery indignation which await the adversaries" of the Lord Jesus: and what I say unto one, I say unto all, "Beware."]

[m] Hab. i. 5.

[n] St. Paul quotes the Septuagint translation, which differs a little, but not materially, from the original Hebrew.

[o] Mark xvi. 16. John iii. 36.

DCCCLXXV.

THE GENTILES RECEIVE THE GOSPEL.

Acts xiii. 46—48. *Then Paul and Barnabas waxed bold, and said, It was necessary that the word of God should first have been*

been spoken to you: but seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles: for so hath the Lord commanded us, saying, I have set thee to be a light of the Gentiles, that thou shouldest be for salvation unto the ends of the earth. And when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad, and glorified the word of the Lord: and as many as were ordained to eternal life, believed.

WHEREVER the word of God has been faithfully dispensed, it has created a diversity of sentiment amongst the hearers; some receiving it with gratitude, and others rejecting it with disdain. Even when our Lord himself preached, "some said he was a good man; whilst others said, Nay, but he deceiveth the people." Such also was the reception which the Gospel met with when ministered by the Apostles: "The multitude was divided; and part held with the Jews, and part with the Apostles[a]." Our blessed Lord foretold this, and declared, that the effect of his Gospel would be, "not to bring peace on earth, but a sword;" and "to set even the nearest relatives against each other[b]." The division occasioned by it at Antioch was exceeding great; the Jews, almost universally, "rejecting it," whilst the Gentiles, in vast multitudes, took the liveliest interest in it; insomuch that the Apostle now for the first time made the instruction and conversion of the Gentiles the great object of his ministrations.

In the words which we have now read, we see,

I. The necessity to which he was reduced—

[The obstinacy of the Jews was attended with the most distressing consequences. They, in the first instance, *disregarded* the Gospel; but, "when they saw almost the whole city come together to hear it," they *set themselves against* it with the utmost violence, "contradicting" it as false, and "blaspheming" it as wicked. With such inveteracy did they put it away from them, that they *pronounced sentence*, as it were, *against themselves*[c], as altogether unworthy of eternal life. On this account, the Apostles, without any further delay, put into execution the Commission they had received, and made a free offer to the Gentiles of the blessings which were thus despised by the Jews.

Now

[a] Acts xiv. 4. [b] Matt. x. 34—36.

[c] This is the meaning of κρίνετε ἑαυτούς.

Now it is a fact which cannot be dissembled, that circumstances not very dissimilar are found, wherever a man of an Apostolic spirit is called to labour: multitudes of those to whom he has been primarily and more particularly sent, not only despise his message, but, when others in the neighbourhood flock to hear his word, "are filled with envy," and complain of the inconvenience they sustain by having their churches so crowded. They also "contradict and blaspheme" both the testimony that is borne, and the Minister who bears it. Thus in effect they "put away the word of God from them," and declare, by their conduct, that they neither value nor desire that salvation, which Christ has purchased for them. Thus, with the most earnest desire to promote the salvation of those whom he regards as his immediate charge, a Minister is often constrained, by the obstinacy of those who will not hear, to be content with addressing himself to those who will; and to regard those as the most endeared objects of his attention, who are not, except by their own voluntary act, contained within the proper sphere of his commission. This is greatly to be regretted, because such despisers of the Gospel both harden themselves, and excite prejudice in others: nevertheless it is a comfort to the faithful Minister to find, that, if rejected by some, there are others who hear him gladly, and know how to appreciate his labours.]

In turning to the Gentiles, he declared,

II. The authority under which he acted—

[He might have mentioned the express injunctions of his Lord[d]: but he knew that his word would have no weight with the Jews; and therefore he cited a passage of the Old Testament, which the Jews themselves understood as referring to the Messiah[e]. The passage he has quoted contains a promise of the Father to the Son, that he should not have the Jews only for a portion, but should be set for light and salvation to the ends of the earth.

Under this authority we now speak: and under this warrant we offer salvation to every Child of man. Behold then, Christ is given for *a light* to the whole world; and all of you who "sit in darkness and the shadow of death" may "come to the brightness of his rising." He is given also "for *salvation*" to the ends of the earth; and every one who is sensible of his lost estate, may "be saved from wrath through him" ———He is God's salvation; provided by him, qualified by him, upheld by him, accepted by him: and every sinner in the universe is not only authorized to trust in him, but is commanded so to do; and is assured by God himself that he shall never be ashamed of his hope———This we are commissioned

[d] Luke xxiv. 47. Acts i. 8. [e] Isai. xlix. 6.

missioned to declare: and if ten thousand bigoted or self-righteous people should reject it with disdain, we trust that we shall never want some contrite auditors, who shall receive it with gratitude and joy.]

In the sequel, we are informed of,

III. The success he obtained—

[The self-condemned Gentiles heard these tidings with joy; and vast multitudes of them "glorified the word of the Lord," receiving it as "a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation." On some indeed the effect was only transient; but as many as were appointed to, and disposed for, eternal life, believed[f]: they "received the word into an honest and good heart," and "brought forth fruit unto perfection."

This is the effect which we hope to see produced in our ministrations. Despisers we expect to meet with, but we expect to find also many in whom our word shall be the power of God unto salvation. Who then amongst you has his heart, like Lydia's, "opened by the Lord?" Who amongst you feels the attractions of God's love, and the constraining influences of his grace? You, we trust, will be the better for the message we deliver: you will become the followers of Christ: you will embrace him, and honour him, and "cleave unto him with full purpose of heart"———]

In the passage we have been considering are two opposite characters, whom it will now be proper to ADDRESS:

1. Those who reject the Gospel—

[Such characters exist as much among those who call themselves Christians, as among the Jews themselves. Think then what you do: "you judge yourselves," that is, you pass sentence on yourselves as "unworthy of everlasting life." Your want of humility betrays your total unfitness for heaven, or even for the offer of the Gospel salvation. Your contempt of the most stupendous effort of God's love that ever men or angels beheld, betrays the same. If you look into the Scripture, you cannot find any resemblance between yourselves and the saints of old: and, if you could go up to heaven, you would not find one of your spirit there. Are you then willing to continue in a state, wherein your whole spirit and conduct declares that you are daily ripening for destruction? O think of it, whilst yet your errors may be rectified, and your iniquities forgiven.]

2. Those

[f] The precise idea contained in the word τασσω is that of a General marshalling his army, and assigning to every one the post he shall occupy, and the work he shall perform. Believers are thus called and appointed of God.

2. Those who are made willing to embrace it—

[Think who it is that has disposed your minds to the attainment of everlasting life: and give him the glory due unto his name. It is God alone that "hath made you to differ" from the unbelieving world; and therefore to him alone must be all the praise. Now then, if you really profess to have experienced the grace of God, we call upon you to "glorify his word:" shew that you believe it to be true: let it be seen that you love it, and trust in it, and obey it; and that you "esteem it more than your necessary food." Attend the ministration of it as the Gentiles did, not with vain curiosity, but with the deepest reverence and most lively gratitude. Hear it as the word of God to your souls: hear it as glad tidings of great joy: and let every succeeding sabbath bring you into a closer acquaintance with it, and a more entire conformity to its dictates. Above all things, attend to what it says of Christ; and receive him as your all-sufficient light, and your complete salvation.]

DCCCLXXVI.

TRIBULATION THE WAY TO HEAVEN.

Acts xiv. 22. *We must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God.*

REAL fortitude is shewn, not more in overcoming difficulties which unexpectedly occur, than in encountering firmly those which are foreseen. In order to meet trials aright, we must be armed with a heavenly principle: and hence arises the need of a fixed principle in the heart of a Christian; since he is assured, that he shall have many enemies to conflict with, and that his way to heaven lies through much tribulation. This is declared to us by an inspired Apostle; who himself experienced the truth of it, and has forewarned us to expect that it shall also be fulfilled in us.

Let us consider his testimony,

I. As confirmed in him—

The whole life of the Apostle, after he embraced the faith of Christ, was an illustration and proof of this truth. View him,

1. On this occasion—

[If ever he might have hoped to escape persecution, it was

was at this time. Consider what he had done in restoring a man who had been a cripple from the womb; and what a spirit the people had manifested towards him, in ascribing to him divine honour, and bringing sacrifices to him as unto a god: Could it be thought that he was in any danger at that place? Yet, behold, no sooner did Jews come from Antioch and Iconium to stir up the people against him, than their minds were changed, and they stoned him as an impostor, whom they had just before proposed to worship as a god: so rapid was the transition from one extreme to another. Just as in the case of our blessed Lord there was but an interval of three days between the acclamations of the populace, and the universal cry of "Crucify him, crucify him," so there was but a step between the deification and destruction of this blessed man.]

2. Through the whole course of his Ministry—

[Like his adorable Master, the Lord Jesus, he was truly "a man of sorrows." Indeed he expected that he should be so, and forewarned his converts respecting it, lest, when they saw the treatment he received, they should be discouraged[a]. When speaking of his sufferings some years afterwards, he especially referred to this particular occasion[b]: but, in fact, it made only a single article out of a long catalogue of trials, which attended him through life[c].]

We are apt to think that persecution was the lot of Christians only in the first ages of the Church: but the Apostle's testimony relates to all Christians of every age; and must therefore be considered,

II. As to be realized in us—

It is a fact that all zealous Christians are persecuted—

[We say not that persecution rages equally at all times; but we affirm, that lively and zealous Christians are hated by the world[d]: that "those who are born after the flesh do still persecute those who are born after the Spirit[e]." There are seasons indeed when the world may seem to favour a servant of God: but, in the midst of all their seeming kindness, there is in their hearts a rooted enmity against him, which, like sediment in clear water, will shew itself, the very instant it is stirred. It needs but little to inflame a whole community against him. They can hear unkind reports respecting others, and disregard them; but in every thing that leads to the disadvantage of a Child of God, they take an interest;

[a] 1 Thes. iii. 3, 4.
[b] 2 Tim. iii. 10, 11.
[c] 2 Cor. xi. 23—28.
[d] Matt. x. 22. John xv. 18, 19.
[e] Gal. iv. 29.

interest; and, like inflammable matter, easily communicate the malignant fire to each other, so as rapidly to produce a general conflagration[f]. And hence every Believer is forewarned to expect persecution as his proper and certain lot[g].]

And God has graciously ordained, that trials shall attend us for our good—

[Our blessed Lord "learned obedience by the things that he suffered," and "was made perfect by sufferings;" and we are to be conformed to him in these respects: we must "suffer with him, in order that we may be glorified together[h]." There is in us a great deal of "dross and tin," which, in the furnace of affliction, must be purged away[i]. Our graces also must be exercised and confirmed by means of trials, which are altogether necessary to call them forth[k]: and to the graces so exercised will our eternal weight of glory be proportioned[l].]

ADDRESS,

1: To those who are the friends of this world—

[This is a state, which, though greatly desired by men in general, is not by any means to be coveted; for it proves infallibly that we are not faithful to our God[m]. It is not possible for light and darkness to coalesce, or for Christ and Belial to agree together[n]. It were better far to be hated of all men for the Lord's sake, than to incur his displeasure for the sake of retaining their good opinion.]

2. Those who suffer for the Lord's sake—

[Be not surprised at any thing that you suffer[o], nor be grieved at it. The Inspired Writers speak of your trials as a just occasion of joy[p]. Only endeavour to improve them aright[q]; and you will never complain of the difficulties of the way, when you have reached your journey's end[r].]

[f] Ps. lvii. 4. & lxiv. 3—6.
[g] 2 Tim. iii. 12.
[h] 1 Pet. ii. 21. Rom. viii. 17, 29.
[i] Isai. i. 25.
[k] Rom. v. 3, 4.
[l] 2 Cor. iv. 17.
[m] Jam. iv. 4.
[n] 2 Cor. vi. 15, 16.
[o] 1 Pet. iv. 12—16.
[p] Jam. i. 2, 3, 12.
[q] 1 Cor. iv. 9—13.
[r] Rom. vii. 14.

DCCCLXXVII.

THE QUESTION ABOUT THE OBLIGATION OF THE CEREMONIAL LAW DECIDED.

Acts xv. 10, 11. *Now therefore why tempt ye God, to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear? But we believe that through the grace*

grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved even as they.

IT is a favourite idea with many, that the Gospels contain all that is needful for us to know, and that it would have been better for the Church if they only had been transmitted to us. But this is indeed to make ourselves wiser than God: for if God had not judged that the other parts of the New Testament would be useful to his Church, he would not have inspired men to write them, nor would he have preserved them for us with such peculiar care. We acknowledge that in the Gospels there are *intimations* of every thing which we need to know: but will any one say, that in the other parts of the New Testament there are not clearer *explanations* of them, or that the Gospels are not rendered far more intelligible by the light reflected upon them in the Epistles? Will any one say, that the purposes of God towards his Church, in the call of the Gentiles, the rejection of the Jews, and the future union of both Jews and Gentiles under one Head, are not more fully understood, than they would have been if the Acts of the Apostles had not been recorded? or that the correspondence between the Law and the Gospel would have been so manifest, if it had not been pointed out to us in the Epistle to the Hebrews? We have now the advantage of knowing what objections were urged against the Gospel, and how those objections were obviated. To go no further than the passage before us: There was a controversy which agitated the whole Christian Church, insomuch that not all the authority of Barnabas or Paul were able to settle it: and a reference was made to the whole college of Apostles at Jerusalem for their decision of the point. That we may have a just view of it, we shall consider,

I. The subject in dispute—

The question was, Whether the Jewish law was obligatory on the Gentiles?

[This, I say, was the original question; but it involved much more, even the whole plan of the Gospel salvation.

Many

Many insisted that circumcision[a], and the observance of the whole Mosaic Law[b], were necessary to salvation. They contended that these were of Divine institution; that the observance of them constituted the grand line of distinction between the Lord's people, and all the rest of mankind; and that the severest judgments were threatened for a wilful neglect of them: and consequently, that they must be obligatory on the Lord's people to the end of time. (It must be remembered, that the advocates of these opinions were not Jews, but Jewish Christians.)

On the other hand, it was maintained, that these laws were never imposed with a view to men's justification by them; for that Abraham was justified before even circumcision itself was ordained[c]:)—that to require the observance of them from the Gentiles was contrary to God's avowed design; (since he had manifested his acceptance of them in their uncircumcised state, precisely in the same way as he had of the Jews who were circumcised[d]:)—that it was impossible for any man to be justified by the observance of them; (since one single deviation from them would utterly condemn him[e]:)—and that to blend the observance of them with the merits of Christ as a joint ground of our hope, was to invalidate the whole Gospel, and to make Christ himself of no effect to us[f]—]

A question precisely similar is agitated amongst us at this day—

[Circumcision and the Jewish Law are indeed, by common consent, rejected by us. But many amongst us proceed on the very same principle as those Judaizing Christians did, and make *works*, either ceremonial or moral, the ground of their hope before God.

Some, and some of no mean name, have gone so far as to assert, that the very act of baptism saves us. Verily, if such sentiments were not expressed in terms which cannot be mistaken, we should think it a libel to impute them to any man who calls himself a Christian, and much more to any one who would make his sentiments in Theology a standard for the Church of Christ. It seems incredible that such Jewish blindness should exist at this day in the Christian Church.

Others, even the great mass of nominal Christians, imagine, that the attending of the House of God and the Lord's Supper, together with common honesty, is sufficient to procure us acceptance with God; or that, if a little more be wanting, the merits of Christ will turn the scale.

Others, who come nearer to the Judaizing Christians of old, maintain, that though our hope is certainly in the Lord Jesus Christ,

[a] ver. 1. [b] ver. 5. [c] Rom. iv. 10, 11. [d] Acts xi. 15—18.
[e] Jam. ii. 10. [f] Rom. ix. 30—32.

Christ, yet some works of ours are necessary to make his merits effectual for our salvation. This is a principle so generally avowed, that to controvert it would be called by many an unchristian heresy.

But (not to notice the two former opinions, which need only to be stated, and they will carry their own condemnation along with them,) this more specious principle is in reality founded on an ignorance of both Law and Gospel. For,

1. The moral law was not, any more than the ceremonial, given with a view to justify men: it was given rather to condemn them, and, as a ministration of death, to shut them up that they might receive life by the Gospel[g]—

2. It is impossible that any man can be saved by his obedience to the Law, because the Law requires perfect obedience; which never has, nor can be, rendered to it by fallen man[h]—

3. To blend our obedience to the Law with the merits of Christ, is to establish a ground for boasting; which it is the main scope and tendency of the Gospel to destroy[i]—

4. Such an union of our works with the faith of Christ is declared to be an utter "subversion of men's souls[k]," and a superseding of all that Christ has done or suffered for us[l].

Here then the question, whether as debated formerly, or as existing at this hour, is fairly stated.]

We now come to,

II. The Apostolic decision of it—

And here we will view,

I. The Apostle Peter's judgment respecting it—

[After the point had been long debated, St. Peter rose to give his opinion. His argument was extremely plain and simple. He reminded the Church, that the Lord Jesus had given to him the keys of the Gospel kingdom, and had commissioned him to open that kingdom both to Jews and Gentiles. To the Jews he had opened it on the day of Pentecost; and to the Gentiles about six years afterwards, when he preached to Cornelius and his friends: and on both occasions God had given the same testimony of his acceptance to the people, pouring out upon the uncircumcised Gentiles, precisely as he had done on the circumcised Jews, his Holy Spirit, both in his miraculous and sanctifying operations[m]. From hence he inferred, that God had unequivocally declared his mind and will, and had shewn, beyond all controversy, that in *his* eyes "neither circumcision was any thing, nor uncircumcision was any thing; but faith, that worketh by love," was all that he required.

[g] 2 Cor. iii. 7, 9. Gal. iii. 21—24.
[h] Gal. iii. 10.
[i] Rom. iii. 27. Eph. ii. 8, 9.
[k] ver. 24.
[l] Gal. v. 2—4.
[m] Compare Note [d] with ver. 7—9.

required. To require therefore from the Gentiles an observance of the Mosaic Law was to "tempt God, and to put on their necks a yoke," which God had never intended to impose.

Having stated thus the grounds of his judgment, he proceeded to give, what we may call, *his confession of faith.* He viewed salvation as a free gift of God to man, for the sake, and through the merits, of the Lord Jesus Christ. This salvation he regarded as wholly gratuitous in all its parts, and as equally so both to Jews and Gentiles: to the Jews it was not given because they were circumcised; nor should it be withheld from the Gentiles because they were uncircumcised; both to the one and to the other it would be freely given, the very instant they believed in the Lord Jesus Christ[n]. No good works were required to merit it; nor was any thing required to make the merits of Christ more effectual: it was given freely, without money and without price; and from first to last must be wholly of grace.]

2. The sentence of the whole College of Apostles at Jerusalem—

[After Peter's sentiments were delivered, Paul and Barnabas confirmed his argument, by stating what God had done among the Gentiles by them; and, by thus uniting their testimony to his, they convinced at once the whole assembly. James, who appears to have presided in the council, drew up the sentence, in which the whole Church concurred. He appealed to Simeon's, that is, Simon Peter's, testimony, as exactly according with the words of prophecy; and then declared, that no such yoke was to be imposed on the converted Gentiles. There were indeed some things, which, under existing circumstances, it would be necessary for the Gentiles to forbear. They in their unconverted state had not merely regarded fornication as lawful, but had actually practised it in their idolatrous worship: they must therefore be especially on their guard against this, not only because it was sinful in itself, and therefore to be shunned by all, but because any approaches towards it would appear like a return to their former idolatry. On the other hand, there were some things forbidden to the Jews, such as "eating of things offered to idols, or things strangled, or the blood" of any animal; and it was necessary that the Gentiles should abstain from these things, lest they should put a stumbling-block in the way of the Jews, or cause disunion in the Church. But, as to their submitting to any rites, or their performing of any works, in order to obtain justification by them, no such thing was required, nor ought any such thing to be required: for, in fact, the requiring of them

[n] Compare the text with Rom. iii. 29, 30.

them would only "subvert their souls," and ruin them for ever.

Now this decision goes to the whole question, as it now exists: for, if the performing of any act in order to obtain salvation by it, either in whole or in part, was unlawful then, it is unlawful now; and if it would subvert their souls, it will equally subvert and destroy ours[o].]

We shall CONCLUDE with,

1. Some cautions respecting yourselves—

[In maintaining this doctrine, there are two cautions especially to be attended to: the one is, that you do not abuse it; and the other, that you do not ever lose sight of it.

Do not abuse it.—If, by an indiscreet statement of it, you give reason to think that you despise morality, you will do incalculable injury to the souls of men. On the one hand, we must never be afraid to assert the doctrine of salvation by faith *alone:* but, on the other hand, we must shew the necessity of good works *as fruits and evidences* of our faith, and must declare in the strongest terms, that an unproductive faith is no better than "the faith of devils[p]." We have only to distinguish between the foundation and the superstructure of a building. Every one can see that they are both necessary, though not necessary *for the same ends:* so they may see that both faith and works are necessary, though *for different ends:* both are good in their proper place; but they are good only for the ends and purposes for which they are required[q].

Again: *Do not ever lose sight of it.*—We see how even Peter himself was, not long after this, turned from the principles he had so firmly maintained[r]. So there is in us a wonderful tendency to lean to legal views, and self-righteous principles. Remember how jealous St. Paul was on this subject[s]; and "stand fast in the liberty wherewith Christ has made you free[t]."]

2. Some directions respecting others—

[As the oppugners of our principles are apt to be intolerant towards us, so it sometimes is found that we speak too contemptuously of them. Now it is certain, that many who have an unfeigned zeal for God, have very imperfect views of this subject[u]: and they ought to be regarded by us with love, and be treated by us with the greatest tenderness. See how the whole Church met together to deliberate on this point for the satisfaction of their weaker Brethren: and should not we exercise

[o] Rom. xi. 6. Gal. ii. 16. [p] Jam. ii. 19, 20. [q] 1 Cor. iii. 11.
[r] Gal. ii. 11—14. [s] Gal. i. 8, 9. [t] Gal. v. 1.
[u] Rom. x. 2, 3.

exercise forbearance towards them, and labour with patience to lead them to clearer views of the subject? If God has given you a more just conception of this great mystery, be thankful for it; but make use of your knowledge, not for the indulgence of vain conceit, but for the edification of men, and the glory of God.

And whilst you seek the benefit of your fellow-Christians, do not forget your elder brethren, the Jews. "They have been broken off from their own stock on account of their unbelief; and we have been grafted in upon it:" remember them with pity, and strive by all possible means to promote their welfare. You see that the blending of their Law with the Gospel was destructive to those among them who embraced Christianity: What then must be the state of those who reject Christianity altogether, and have no hope but in their law, which yet it is impossible for them, under their present circumstances, to obey? It is a shame to the Christian world, that we take so little pains to enlighten their minds, and to bring them to the knowledge of the truth. Consider then with yourselves what can be done for them, and how you yourselves in your respective stations may contribute to their good. And pray to God, that he will bring them back to his fold, and unite them with us under one head, that "through the whole world there may be but one Lord, and his name one[x]."]

[x] Zech. xiv. 9.

DCCCLXXVIII.

INQUIRY INTO THE STATE OF THE CHURCH.

Acts xv. 36. *And some days after, Paul said unto Barnabas, Let us go again and visit our brethren, in every city where we have preached the word of the Lord, and see how they do.*

IT is of the nature of Divine grace to be always operative, and never to remit its exertions, whilst there is any good to be done. Under its superabundant influence, Paul and Barnabas were carried through all the labours and difficulties to which they had been expressly called by the Holy Ghost, and for which they had been set apart by the Church at Antioch[a]. But Paul, not content with having executed the work assigned him, desired to renew his labours, in order to the further advancement of it in all the Churches which he had planted: and for this end

[a] Ch. xiii 2, 3. with xiv. 26.

end he proposed to Barnabas to go and visit all the Churches again, and see in what state they were: "Let us go again, &c. &c."

We will,

I. Consider this proposal, in reference to the Churches then formed—

It is impossible not to admire the spirit by which it was dictated, or to withhold our approbation from the proposal itself. It was,

1. A desirable proposal—

[Churches, like plantations in the natural world, are liable to great variations: they may thrive and flourish, or they may be blighted and wither. If we examine all the Churches founded by the Apostles, we shall find, that in some there were abuses, in others errors, in others divisions; and in all there were many things which needed to be checked by Apostolic wisdom, and to be rectified by Apostolic authority. But in Churches planted by these two Apostles, it might well be expected, that they should possess peculiar influence; because, in addition to the respect with which they would be regarded as Apostles of Christ, they would be considered by every one as standing to him in the relation of a father: and hence there would be in all places a ready acquiescence in their wishes, and a willing obedience to their injunctions. This was the effect which the Apostle expected to be produced at Corinth, when he said, "I will come to you shortly, if the Lord will; and will know, not the speech of them that are puffed up, but the power[b]:" And again, "The rest will I set in order when I come[c]."

Such, we doubt not, was the original design of Episcopal visitations: and, if this great end were kept more in view, we have reason to think that the greatest possible good would result from them[d].]

2. A benevolent proposal—

[This was not a proposal for *an excursion of pleasure*, but for *a service of great difficulty and danger*. Conspiracies were often formed against their lives; and at one place Paul had been stoned, and left for dead[e]. In this respect Paul trod in the

[b] 1 Cor. iv. 19. [c] 1 Cor. xi. 34.

[d] If this were the subject of *a Visitation Sermon*, here would be an excellent occasion for shewing what inquiries should be made as to the *Spiritual* state of the different Churches, and *the effects produced by the Ministry of the word*, in awakening the careless, in comforting the afflicted, in sanctifying the corrupt.

[e] Ch. xiv. 5, 6, 19.

the steps of his Divine Master, who, to the utter amazement of his Disciples, proposed to go up again to Judea, where his adversaries had just before sought to stone him[f]: like him he "counted not his life dear unto him, so that he might but fulfil the Ministry which he had received of the Lord Jesus:" he willingly endured all things for the elect's sake, that they might obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory." Even where his labours were less acceptable, he willingly devoted himself to the service of his fellow-creatures, and would "gladly spend, and be spent, for them; though the more abundantly he loved them, the less he were loved." O that such benevolence were more common in the Church! O that every Minister could appeal unto God, "how greatly he longed after his people in the bowels of Christ," and even "travailed in birth with them, as it were, again and again, till Christ should be manifestly formed in them[g]!"]

3. A beneficial proposal—

[Unhappily the proposal was an occasion of a very fierce contention between the two Apostles. Not that Barnabas was less delighted to accept the proposal, than Paul was to make it: but Barnabas wished "to take with them John, whose surname was Mark;" which Paul could in no wise consent to do. Mark had accompanied them for some time in their former journey; but had forsaken them when he found that their work was attended with so much difficulty and danger: and on this account Paul thought him unfit for the labour, and unworthy of the honour, of attending them again. In this matter neither of the Apostles would give way; so that they separated from each other, and, as far as we know, never saw each other again in this world[i].

To decide between the two, where God himself has not decided, is difficult: yet we apprehend that Barnabas was the more blameable of the two; first, because he seems to have been too much actuated by partiality for *his nephew*[k]; and next, because the Church at Antioch appear to have sided with the apostle Paul; "commending *him* with renewed earnestness to the grace of God," whilst Barnabas was suffered to depart without any such expressions of their regard[l]. Still it seems as if Paul himself was not wholly blameless, in suffering the contention to rise to such a pitch; when, if he had proposed to refer the matter to God with solemn fasting and prayer, we can have no doubt but that God would have made known to them his will respecting it.

The

[f] John xi. 7, 8.
[g] Gal. iv. 19.
[h] Ch. xiii. 2, 5, 13. with xv. 38.
[i] ver. 39.
[k] Col. iv. 10.
[l] ver. 40.

The separation however was overruled for good: for Paul went with Silas, and Barnabas with Mark, each to his native country[m], where they hoped to labour with most effect; and thus "confirmed and established more Churches[n]" than they could have done, if they had executed the plan that was at first proposed.]

We will now endeavour to,

II. Fulfil the design in reference to the Church here present—

The design of their projected journey was, to inquire into the state of the different Churches which they had planted: "Let us go and see how they do." Now if such an inquiry was necessary among the Apostolic Churches, doubtless it cannot be superfluous amongst us. We will direct our inquiry then,

1. Generally, to the Church at large—

[We are called a Christian Church: but are there not many amongst us who have no more of Christianity than the name? In the Church of Philadelphia there were some who "said they were Jews, and were not, but did lie[o]:" and so it is amongst us: there are many who "name the name of Christ," without ever once endeavouring "to depart from iniquity," or truly to give up themselves to him as his disciples. But, to speak rather of those who profess a love for the Gospel, and who therefore more resemble the primitive Church; Are there not many who "have a name that they live, and yet are dead;" or, at least, "the gracious dispositions that remain in them are so weak, that they are ready to die[p]?" Are there not many who "have left their first love[q]," and are relapsed into such a lukewarm state, neither cold nor hot, that they are as hateful to God as if they made no profession at all[r]? And are there not many also of whom it must be said, that "their works are not perfect before God[s];" and that, instead of having "their last works more than their first[t]," they have lost much of their spirituality and devotion to God? Verily, if we were to address you all, as John did Gaius, and "wish your bodies to be in health, and prosper as your souls prosper," we fear that we should be wishing the greater part of you either sick or dead[u].]

2. Parti-

[m] Acts iv. 36. & xxi. 29.
[n] ver. 41. & Ch. xvi. 5.
[o] Rev. iii. 9.
[p] ib. ver. 1, 2.
[q] Rev. ii. 4.
[r] Rev. iii. 15, 16.
[s] Rev. iii. 2.
[t] Rev. ii. 19.
[u] 3 John, ver. 2.

2. Particularly, to different classes of Christians in the Church—

[St. John divides the members of Christ's mystical body into three classes, "*little children*, *young men*, and *fathers*." We ask then of the "*little children*," In what state are you? Are you "growing in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ?" and, in order to the promotion of that growth, are you "desiring and delighting in the sincere milk of the word [x]?" Are you sensible of your weakness and sinfulness; and looking to the Lord Jesus Christ to cleanse you daily in his blood, and to uphold you by his Spirit? And are you so diligent in every good work, as to "make your profiting appear unto all?" To the *young men*, of whom it is said that "the word of God abideth in them, and that they overcome the wicked one [y]," we next address ourselves: Do you indeed find that "the word of Christ dwells richly in you in all wisdom?" that the precepts are your guide, and the promises your support? Do you go forth with that "word as the sword of the Spirit," to fight with all your spiritual enemies? and do you shew from day to day, that you are gaining fresh victories over the flesh and all its lusts, the world and all its vanities, and the devil and all his temptations? If there be any amongst us who, on account of their long standing and their high attainments in the Divine life, are worthy the name of *fathers*, we would ask of them, Are you increasingly growing in an acquaintance with God, so as to "walk with him," like Enoch? and are you "forgetting all that you have attained, and reaching forth to still higher attainments, and pressing forward for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus?"

Let all of every class search and try themselves, that they may know what answer to give to such inquiries as these. The great High Priest walketh among the seven golden candlesticks, and observes infallibly the state of every lamp, whether it be burning dimly, or its light be bright [z]: and to every one will he give according to his state before God [a]. Let this inquiry then lead you all to diligent examination, and redoubled earnestness in the ways of God: for "we have no greater joy, than that our children walk in truth [b]:" and "then we live, if ye stand fast in the Lord [c]."]

[x] 1 Pet. ii. 2. [y] 1 John ii. 14. [z] Rev. i. 14, 20.
[a] Rev. i. 23. [b] 3 John, ver. 4. [c] 1 Thess. iii. 8.

DCCCLXXIX.

THE CONVERSION OF LYDIA.

Acts xvi. 14, 15. *And a certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira, which worshipped God, heard us: whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended to the things that were spoken of Paul. And when she was baptized, and her household, she besought us, saying, If ye have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my my house, and abide there. And she constrained us.*

IN preaching the Gospel to mankind, every Minister will not be alike successful; though every one may expect such a measure of success, as shall be a testimony from God to the truth of his declarations, and a seal to the commission with which he has been charged[a]. More especially may we hope to convert sinners unto God, if we are attentive to the calls of his providence, respecting the proper sphere of our labours. We may, like the Apostles, spread our net wide, and "toil all the night, and catch nothing:" but, if our Lord instruct us where to cast the net, we may hope to inclose a multitude of fishes. The commission given to the Apostles was to "go and preach the Gospel to every creature;" yet there were particular places to which, at particular times, their attention was more especially directed. St. Paul, after going through Phrygia and the region of Galatia, would have gone into Asia and Bithynia; but he was forbidden by the Holy Ghost to go there[b]; and was instructed by a vision to go over rather into Macedonia[c]. There therefore he went; and there he met with the woman of whom our text speaks; and was the happy instrument of saving her soul alive. Her name, her occupation, her character, and the place of her nativity, are all distinctly noticed: she was called "Lydia;" and was "of the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple" clothes; and a worshipper of the true God. We forbear, however, to dwell on these circumstances, in order that we may consider more fully the *means* and *evidences* of *her conversion*:—

I. The

[a] Jer. xxiii. 22. [b] ver. 6, 7. [c] ver. 9, 10.

I. The means of her conversion—

Lydia was, by nature, like all the rest of mankind: her heart was shut against the truths of the Gospel: nor could she either receive or know them, because she possessed not a spiritual discernment. But the Lord "knocked, as it were, at the door" of her heart, and constrained her to open to him: he fixed her attention to the subject which Paul insisted on; gave her an insight into it; inclined her cordially to embrace the truth; and thus "subdued her to the obedience of faith."

Now this is the way in which the work of conversion is always effected—

[We say not that every person is wrought upon as suddenly as she was; or that there are not many subordinate points in which the conversion of others may differ from hers: but we are sure that every natural man is blind to the Gospel of Christ[d]; that both the sublimity of its doctrines and the purity of its precepts is offensive to him; and that an effort of omnipotence is exerted to overcome the reluctance of his soul: and that, till that influence is felt, he will hold fast his delusions, "confounding good and evil, sweet and bitter, light and darkness."]

Nor can it be effected by any other means whatever—

[If good dispositions would effect it, or if human eloquence could effect it, she might have been converted without any such exercise of the Divine power; seeing that she was already "a worshipper" of the true God, and had Paul for her instructor. But we are expressly told, that the work of conversion depends not on any such circumstances, but that it is altogether the effect of a divine operation on the soul[e]. The Disciples, who had the peculiar advantage of our Lord's instructions for above three years together, and *that* in private as well as in public, could not understand the most important parts of Scripture, till "he opened their understandings[f]." In like manner, there is yet a veil on the hearts of men whilst they read and hear the Scriptures; nor can any but God remove it[g]. Hence it is plainly declared by our Lord himself, that "no man can come unto him, except he be drawn of the Father[h]." However humiliating therefore the truth may be, we are constrained to say, in relation to every man that

[d] 1 Cor. ii. 14. [e] John i. 13. [f] Luke xxiv. 45.
[g] 2 Cor. iii. 13—16. [h] John vi. 44,45.

that is converted, that the work "is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy[i]."]

That a great and effectual work was wrought upon her will appear, whilst we consider,

II. The evidences of her conversion—

Here we are called to notice,

1. Her public profession of the faith of Christ—

[She was not ashamed to acknowledge the conviction that had been wrought on her mind; nor was she afraid to confess her faith in Jesus of Nazareth. Accordingly, she was, together with all her household, baptized immediately, in token that she had embraced the Christian covenant, and was become a disciple of the Lord Jesus. This, it is true, was not a decisive proof of sound conversion; because some submitted to the rite of baptism who had not received the grace of God in truth[k]: but it was a strong *presumptive evidence* of her sincerity, inasmuch as it exposed her to all the obloquy and persecution, which were the common lot of Christians at that day. The insincere were deterred by these considerations from acting according to the dictates of their conscience[l]: but the upright uniformly and universally complied with them; and exerted their influence over their respective households, to bring them also by baptism into covenant with Christ.

In this, her example deserves *particular attention:* for though, on account of our having already received the seal of the covenant in baptism, we are not again to be baptized, yet are we to maintain the same fidelity as she did, and to shew, by the whole of our conduct, whose we are, and whom we have engaged to serve[m]———]

2. Her zealous attachment to the cause of Christ—

[She felt an ardent love towards him who had been the instrument of her conversion; and a most unfeigned desire to glorify her God, to whose grace alone she was indebted for all the blessings she had received. Hence she desired, and urged the Apostles, if they accounted her sincere, to come and take up their abode under her roof. This was attended, not only with expense, but with considerable danger too[n]: but she had counted the cost in every way, and was well content to pay it.

This was an excellent evidence in her favour: for this kind of love is particularly specified by God himself as one of those "things which accompany salvation[o]:" and in a very eminent

[i] Rom. ix. 16. [k] Acts viii. 13. [l] John xii. 42, 43.
[m] Rom. x. 10. [n] Acts xvi. 22. & xvii. 6—9. [o] Heb. vi. 9, 10.

eminent degree it may be considered as "fulfilling the law of Christ[p]." Respecting the exercise of such dispositions under the Christian dispensation, and the consecration of all our wealth to the service of our God, the prophet Isaiah spoke repeatedly[q]: and wherever the grace of God reigns in the heart, it will produce these effects in the life and conversation[r].]

We shall conclude this subject with some REFLECTIONS naturally arising from it:

1. How necessary in divine ordinances is the Lord's presence!

[Of all the women who heard the Apostle at that time, we hear of only one who gave due attention to the things that were spoken by him: and the source of the difference between her and the others was, that "the Lord opened her heart." To this source must we trace all the good that is done by the ministration of the Gospel[s]: whoever be the preacher, God alone is the author of the blessing[t].]

2. How great are the obligations of those whose eyes are opened!

[Consider the change wrought on her at the time, and the effect of it on her everlasting state; what cause had she to adore and magnify the grace of God! So it is with all who are made monuments of Divine grace: they are indeed "brands plucked out of the burning;" and to all eternity must ascribe their happiness, not to themselves, but unto Him that "chose them from before the foundation of the world," and gave them to his Dear Son, to be the trophies of his redeeming love[u].]

3. How anxious should we be to adorn the doctrine we have received!

[Lydia did not wait to have this burthen imposed upon her; she sought of her own accord, and *that* with great earnestness, permission to bear it; yea, she accounted it not a burthen, but an honour and a joy. Thus it was with the Christians in the Churches of Macedonia[x]: and thus should it be with us also. We should long and pant after opportunities of honouring our God: we should value nothing any further than it may be subservient to that end: we should account ourselves, and all that we possess, as the Lord's property[y]; and we should make it the one labour of our lives to "glorify him with our bodies and our spirits, which are his."]

[p] Gal. vi. 2, 10. [q] Isai. xxiii. 18. & lx. 9. [r] 2 Cor. viii. 7, 8.
[s] Isai. liii. 1. Acts xi. 21. 1 Thess. i. 5. [t] 2 Cor. iii. 6, 7.
[u] John xv. 16. Rom. ix. 16. Eph. i. 4—6. [x] 2 Cor. viii. 1—4.
[y] 1 Cor. vi. 20.

DCCCLXXX.

A SPIRIT OF DIVINATION CAST OUT.

Acts xvi. 16—18. *And it came to pass, as we went to prayer, a certain damsel possessed with a spirit of divination met us, which brought her masters much gain by soothsaying: the same followed Paul and us, and cried, saying, These men are the servants of the Most High God, which shew unto us the way of salvation. And this she did many days. But Paul, being grieved, turned and said to the spirit, I command thee, in the name of Jesus Christ, to come out of her. And he came out the same hour.*

IT has been thought by many, that all which the Scriptures speak respecting the possession of men by Satan, is merely figurative; and that the effects ascribed to such possessions must be referred to other causes. Accordingly, the expulsion of evil spirits from men by Jesus Christ is considered by them as only a cure of some particular disorders. But, if there be some passages which may possibly admit of such an interpretation, there are others that cannot be so explained. The damsel of whom our text speaks, is represented as having "a spirit of divination;" which, according to the opinion of the fore-mentioned persons, was a mere fiction only, to impose upon the credulity of the weak. Her art is regarded as nothing more than a conspiracy between her and her masters to deceive the world by juggling and imposture. But, if this was the case, how could the command given by St. Paul to the spirit that was in her, prevent her from practising the same deceits in future? Yet it did dispossess her of talents with which she had before been endowed, and deprived her masters of all hope of further gain from the exercise of those talents[a]. This is a clear proof, that she had really been possessed by an evil spirit; and that that spirit had imparted to her powers, different from any that are common to the rest of mankind. Without stopping to enter into the general question of Satanic possessions, which we consider as sufficiently determined by the fact recorded

[a] ver. 19.

recorded in our text, we shall confine our attention to the account here given of the damsel that was possessed; and shall notice,

I. The testimony she bore respecting them—

In considering her testimony, we notice,

1. The design of it—

[We doubt not but that it was intended to bring the Apostles into disrepute, and to induce a suspicion that they were in confederacy with the devil———This was a scheme which Satan had long before practised in relation to our Lord himself, who, knowing his subtle intentions, repeatedly interposed with authority to prevent his further exercise of this device[b]———]

2. The substance was perfectly correct—

[The testimony itself; The Apostles were "the servants of the Most High God;" and their one employment was, "to shew unto men the way of salvation." The same is true also respecting us: for though we are not called precisely in the same way as the Apostles were, nor have precisely the same commission given to us, yet we are truly "servants of God," sent by him, as his Ambassadors, to bring men into a state of reconciliation with him: and we trust that, as it is our office, so it is our delight, "to shew unto men the way of salvation." "We come, preaching peace by Jesus Christ." We declare that "Christ is *the Way*, the truth, and the life; and that no man cometh unto the Father but by him"——— On the other hand, we declare, that God "will cast out none who come to him" in that way; and that "Christ will save to the uttermost all who come unto God by him"———]

However gratifying we might suppose such a testimony to be, it was far from being acceptable to the Apostles; as we see by,

II. The conduct they observed respecting her—

1. For many days they waited, to see what God might do by her means: but at last they commiserated her state—

[St. Paul was "grieved" at her, as well he might be: for, whilst she was bearing this testimony from day to day, she sought not the way of salvation for her own soul, and obstructed, rather than promoted, the salvation of others.

And have not *we* similar cause for grief on account of multitudes around us? Yes truly. There are many who espouse the cause of faithful Ministers, and profess to believe the truths

[b] Luke iv. 33—35, 41.

truths they preach, whilst yet they are altogether slaves of sin and Satan———Now such are greatly to be pitied, both on account of the state of their own souls, and on account of the injury they do to the souls of others. As it respects themselves, their knowledge only aggravates their guilt[c]; and their casting a stumbling-block before others involves them in a heavier condemnation[d]———]

2. They exerted themselves for her relief—

[Being endued with the power of working miracles, they commanded the evil spirit to come out of her: and that command, issued as it was in the name of Jesus Christ, instantly liberated her from her sore bondage.

To effect similar wonders is not in our power: but yet we are authorized to declare to men how they may obtain a similar deliverance. A believing application to Jesus will bring Omnipotence to their aid: and "the strong man armed" can no longer retain possession of their souls, when "the stronger than he," even the Lord Jesus Christ, comes forth to eject him. Are there any then amongst you who know the truths of the Gospel without experiencing their sanctifying and saving efficacy? Cry mightily to the Lord; and he will work effectually in your behalf: yea, he will make use of the word which ye now hear, to "turn you from darkness unto light, and from the power of Satan unto God"———]

Now this subject opens the way to some important DISTINCTIONS—

Let us learn from hence,

1. To distinguish between the advocates of the Gospel and the Gospel itself—

[If any were hardened in their infidelity by means of that damsel, they were exceeding blameable; for her testimony did not at all affect either the persons respecting whom it was borne, or the Gospel itself. The adversaries of the Gospel are very fond of referring to the characters of its advocates; and if they can find that any of its professors have dishonoured it by their conduct, they will bring that as an argument against the Gospel itself. But was Jesus an impostor, because demoniacs confessed him to be the Christ? Were the Apostles less to be regarded as servants of the Most High God, because this damsel, by Satanic agency, bore testimony to them under that character? Or was the path, which they pointed out to men as the way of salvation, less worthy to be trodden, because it received her sanction? So then, neither is the Gospel less worthy of acceptation because

[c] John iii. 19. [d] Matt. xviii. 7.

because some dishonour it by their conduct; nor are we the more to be considered as deceivers, because there may be amongst our hearers some who "hold the truth in unrighteousness." The Gospel is wholly independent both of those who preach it and those who profess it: we call upon you therefore to receive it with all humility of mind. Whatever be the character of its advocates or its adversaries, it declares the only way in which a sinner can be saved: and to those who cordially embrace it, it shall be the power of God unto salvation — — —]

2. To distinguish between an approbation of the Gospel, and the actual experience of it in our own souls—

[Men, if they change their sentiments, and especially if they shew an attachment to the truths of the Gospel, are apt to think that they are truly converted unto God. But conversion is a change of heart, and not of sentiment only: it is "a renewing *in the spirit of our mind.*" Let us inquire then, not merely whether we are "turned from darkness unto light," but whether we are "turned from the power of Satan unto God." If we are still habitually under the power of Satan in any thing, we have no part nor lot in the Gospel salvation. Let us then search and try our hearts; and beg of God also to search and try us, lest we deceive our own souls, and perish in our sins. True it is, that if we receive the Gospel aright, we shall, like Lydia, shew a cordial attachment to those who are sent of God to dispense it to us: but we shall delight also in the commandments of our God; we shall live nigh to God in the constant exercise of prayer and praise; we shall grow up into his image, and be advancing from day to day in righteousness and true holiness. See to it then, Brethren, that ye have these evidences of conversion; for "then shall ye not be ashamed, when ye have respect unto all God's commandments."]

DCCCLXXXI.

THE CONVERSION OF THE JAILOR.

Acts xvi. 29—31. *Then he called for a light, and sprang in, and came trembling, and fell down before Paul and Silas; and brought them out, and said, Sirs, what must I do to be saved? And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.*

VARIOUS are the ways in which God effects the conversion of sinners to himself. Some he draws by the

the attractive influences of his Spirit; causing his word to distil as dew upon their souls, and imperceptibly, as it were, opening their understandings (as he did Lydia's[a]), and inclining their hearts to embrace his truth. With others he deals rather in a way of fear and terror; filling them with compunction (as he did the converts on the day of Pentecost[b]), and awakening them from their security by some awful dispensation of his providence. It was thus that he impressed the savage mind of the jailor, whose conversion we are about to consider. By an earthquake at midnight, (an earthquake that shook the very foundations of the prison, and opened all its doors,) he first rendered him sensible of his guilt and danger, and stimulated him to make the inquiries, which terminated in the conversion and salvation of his soul.

The jailor's inquiry, and the answer given to it, will form the natural division of our text.

I. The jailor's inquiry—

In this there are two things worthy of particular attention:

1. The importance of it—

[There is no other concern in this world of so *great*, or so *universal*, importance. The inquiring, "What we shall eat, or drink, or be clothed with," is certainly necessary in this present state of existence: but those things are not worth a thought, in comparison of the salvation of the soul[c] ——— Nor is there any human Being who needs not this inquiry. All are sinners; and, as sinners, condemned: all therefore have reason to dread the wrath of God, and to ask how they may obtain mercy at his hands ——— Youth, learning, riches, do not at all supersede the necessity of this inquiry: all are liable to be summoned, at any moment, into the presence of their God, who is no respecter of persons, but will judge every man according to his works ——— They who have embraced the salvation offered by him in the Gospel, will be saved by him: they who have slighted and neglected it, whatever be their rank or condition in life, will perish.]

2. The manner in which it was made—

[Here we see *an earnestness suited to the object inquired after*,

[a] ver. 14. [b] Acts ii. 37.

[c] Matt. vi. 31—33. The soul! Heaven! Hell! Eternity! what weighty considerations!

after, and *a determination of heart to follow any directions* which these servants of God should give him. He did not, like Pilate, ask with indifference, "What is truth[d]?" and then go away, without waiting for an answer: nor did he, like the Jews at Rome, ask in a mere speculative or inquisitive manner, "We desire to hear of thee what thou thinkest[e]." It was with him a personal concern; a matter of the greatest importance. He had no disposition to cavil or dispute; but an ardent desire to know how he might obtain mercy at the hands of his offended God. They needed only to point out to him the way of life, and he was ready without hesitation to use the means prescribed, how difficult soever the task might be, or whatever sacrifices he might be called to make in the pursuit of this great object ———]

And now let us see what was,

II. The answer given him—

Behold,

1. Its simplicity—

[Men, by cavils and disputes, have thrown obscurity over the plainest of all truths. To the proud and self-sufficient, the faith of the Gospel is made a stumbling-block: but to the humble and contrite, the light of the meridian sun is not more clear. Here are *no conditions imposed, no limitations fixed.* It is not said, "If you will do so many good works, Jesus Christ will accept you:" but simply, "Believe in him:" believe that he has died to save sinners; believe, that by the blood of his cross he has made reconciliation for you with God, and that he will save to the uttermost all that come unto God by him." Think not to purchase the Divine favour by any thing of your own, but seek it as the free gift of God for Christ's sake. "Look" to Christ, as the wounded Israelites did to the brazen serpent; and "wash" in the fountain of his blood, as Naaman did in the streams of Jordan: then shall you "be healed" from your leprosy, and "be saved" from the deadly wounds of sin——— Yes, you, notwithstanding the treatment you have shewn to us, his servants, and notwithstanding you have never thought of salvation till this moment of terror and alarm, even *you* shall surely, shall instantly, be saved by him, if only you trust in him with your whole heart——— What beautiful simplicity is there in this way of salvation!]

2. Its efficacy—

["Sharper than a two-edged sword was the word" spoken by Paul and Silas. As it suited the jailor's case, so it reached his heart, and proved "the power of God to the salvation of his

[d] John xviii. 38. [e] Acts xxviii. 22.

his soul." *It instantly turned his sorrow into joy*[f] — — — *It* also, *with no less rapidity, changed and renewed his soul.* But a few hours before, he had with unrelenting cruelty executed the commission which he had received from the persecuting magistrates; "thrusting these divine messengers into the inner prison, and making their feet fast in the stocks." But now "he took them into his own house, and washed their stripes, and set meat before them:" yea, "the very same hour of the night" did he thus evince the truth of his conversion — — — Finally, *it caused him, without hesitation, to become a determined follower of Christ.* Though he saw what he was likely to suffer for the truth's sake, he did "not consult with flesh and blood," or temporize at all; but immediately, with all his household, devoted himself to God in baptism, and avowed himself a friend of this persecuted religion.

Surely the wonder-working rod of Moses did not more clearly display the power of God, when it divided the Red Sea, or brought water from the rock, than this simple declaration did in the change it wrought on this ferocious jailor.]

ADDRESS,

1. The secure—

[When do you intend to begin this inquiry? Is it a fit employment for a dying hour? — — — Will the consciousness of having neglected it excite no fears when you are just entering on eternity, or leave no room for regret when you stand at the judgment-seat of Christ? — — — O that you were wise, and would consider your latter end! — — —]

2. The fearful—

[Some who make this inquiry, we trust, in sincerity, yet do not derive comfort from the Apostle's direction: they are so discouraged by a sense of their own unworthiness, that they are not able to lay hold on the promises of the Gospel: they are ready to think it would be presumption in them to expect mercy in so free a way. But, whatever have been their past state, they *may* come, yea, they *must* come to Christ in this way. If our unworthiness were a bar to our acceptance with God, who would ever be saved? — — — But the fact is, that such persons do not see enough of their unworthiness; for if they did, they would immediately perceive that they must come to Christ, as the most unworthy of his creatures, or lie down in everlasting despair.

Dear Brethren, do not indulge pride under the garb of humility;

[f] ver. 34. He was enabled to see the freeness, the suitableness, the sufficiency of the Gospel salvation, and to trust with confidence in the promises made to him in Christ Jesus. Thus were his fears dissipated, and his terrors changed into exultation and triumph.

humility; but be willing to come to Christ as ye are. Only feel as the jailor did, and you need not fear but that you shall be accepted as readily as the jailor was———]

3. The believing—

[Doubtless some of you have been enabled to believe in Christ, and to found all your hopes on his atoning sacrifice. Let me then say to you, that you must not consider the work of faith as *done*, but merely as *begun*, and as necessary to be *carried on* every day and hour. You must "live still from day to day by faith on the Son of God"——— At the same time, O let me remind you to "shew forth your faith by your works." You see how the jailor honoured God, by a cordial acquiescence in the terms proposed, a bold confession of the crucified Jesus, a thorough change both of heart and life, and a joyful expectation that not a tittle of God's word should fail. Go ye on thus, trusting in God with all your hearts, and glorifying God with all your souls.]

DCCCLXXXII.

PROOFS THAT JESUS IS THE MESSIAH.

Acts xvii. 2—5. *And Paul, as his manner was, went in unto them, and three sabbath-days reasoned with them out of the Scriptures, opening and alleging, that Christ must needs have suffered, and risen again from the dead; and that this Jesus, whom I preach unto you, is Christ. And some of them believed, and consorted with Paul and Silas; and of the devout Greeks a great multitude, and of the chief women not a few. But the Jews which believed not, moved with envy, took unto them certain lewd fellows of the baser sort, and gathered a company, and set all the city in an uproar.*

THE dispersion of the Jews through every part of the Roman empire greatly facilitated the diffusion of the Gospel in the Apostolic age: for in all the capital cities of the empire there were synagogues, to which the Apostles had access, and where on the sabbath-days they were sure of meeting a large assembly of their countrymen. Of these advantages St. Paul invariably availed himself: for though he was "a Minister of the uncircumcision," and was sent principally to the Gentiles, yet he in every place addressed himself in the first place to the Jews, and only turned to the Gentiles when the Jews rejected

the gracious tidings which he delivered to them. In discoursing with the Jews, he constantly appealed to the holy Scriptures, which they themselves acknowledged to be of Divine authority; but, if in many instances he succeeded in convincing them, in many instances he failed.

In the passage which we have now read, we see,

I. The means he used for the conversion of the Jews—

Two things he laboured to establish;

1. That the Scriptures represented the Messiah as one who should die and rise again—

[To establish this, he adduced a multitude of passages which he knew to have been generally received, as descriptive of the Messiah. On other occasions we are informed what particular passages were cited: and from them we may guess what passages the Apostle insisted on at this time. He no doubt shewed the Jews, that the death and resurrection of the Messiah were *declared in* the plainest *prophecies*, and *shadowed forth in* the most significant *types*.

In speaking of the prophecies, he might well appeal to that very first promise that was given to man[a]: What could that mean, but that Satan was first to "bruise his heel," by bringing him down to the grave; and that Christ should afterwards, by his resurrection, "bruise his head," and destroy his empire in the world? In the Psalms these truths are yet more plain and express. It was said that the Potentates of the earth should combine to destroy him; but that he should be seated on God's holy hill of Zion, and, being exalted to the right hand of power, he should dash in pieces his enemies as a potter's vessel[b]. Again, "His soul was not to be left in hell, nor was this Holy One to see corruption[c]." Does not that clearly shew that his soul was first to go into hell, *i. e.* the place of departed spirits; and that his body was to be consigned to the grave; and that he was afterwards to rise from the dead, and go into the presence of his Father, where there is a fulness of joy for evermore[d]? Again; his sufferings are, in the 22d Psalm, minutely described, as preparatory to that exaltation which he was to receive, when "the kingdom should be his, and he should be the Governor among the nations[e]." The prophet Isaiah speaks of these things in as plain language as the New Testament itself. The Messiah, according to him, was to have his visage marred more than any

[a] Gen. iii. 15. [b] Ps. ii. 1—9. [c] Ps. xvi. 9, 10.
[d] ib. ver. 11. [e] Ps. xxii. 1—18, 22, 27, 28.

any man, previous to his sprinkling of many nations, and converting to himself the kings of the earth[f]———— Daniel also speaks to the same effect, saying, that the very Messiah, who was to possess an everlasting kingdom, must nevertheless be first "cut off," though not for himself, but for his people's sins, to make reconciliation for their iniquities, and to bring in everlasting righteousness[g].

Now the Apostle would ask, Are not these passages contained in your Scriptures? and have not the most pious and learned men of our own nation considered them as predictions relative to their Messiah? And do they not in that view prove indisputably, that Christ *must* die and rise again?

We may conceive him, then, as proceeding to the types, by which these things were shadowed forth. What, he would say, meant the restoration of Isaac from the dead, but the restoration of God's only dear Son from the dead, after he had been offered a sacrifice for sin[h]? What meant all the Mosaic sacrifices, and the carrying of their blood within the veil, but the shedding of Christ's blood, and his going afterwards, as our great High Priest, with his own blood, into the holy place not made with hands; himself being shadowed forth, both by the victim that was offered, and the priest that offered it[i]? What meant that peculiar offering, the two birds; of which one was killed; and the other, dipped in its blood, was let loose into the air[k]? or that of the two goats, whereof one was slain, and the other, with all the sins of Israel put upon its head, led into the wilderness, that it might never more be seen of men? Were these of doubtful signification? Do they not prove clearly what the Messiah was to do and suffer; even that, for the accomplishment of our redemption, he *must* die, and rise again from the dead? Did not Jonah too, that noted type of Christ, descend to the depths of the sea, before he was brought forth again on dry land?

Methinks he would dwell with delight on these unanswerable topics, and strive with all his might to fix conviction on their minds.]

2. That Jesus, whom he preached unto them, was the Christ—

[That Jesus answered to all these predictions in his sufferings, they could not doubt. It was a matter of public notoriety, that he had been put to death, even the accursed death of the cross. His resurrection indeed the Jews did attempt to deny: but the Apostles, who had seen and conversed with

[f] Isai. lii. 14, 15. See also liii. 9—12.
[g] Dan. vii. 13, 14. with ix. 24, 26.
[h] Heb. xi. 17—19.
[i] Heb. ix. 7, 11, 12.
[k] Lev. xiv. 49—53.

with him after his death, and were endued by him with a power of working miracles in confirmation of their word, attested, with one voice, that he was risen, and had ascended up to heaven in their sight. This testimony they were ready to seal with their blood: and therefore they called upon all to believe in Jesus, as the person in whom the Scriptures had received their full accomplishment — — —]

One might have hoped that all should have been convinced by such testimonies; but, alas! there was a great diversity in,

II. The effects produced by them—

Some, we are told, believed—

[The word came to some of them "not in word only, but in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance." These united themselves to the Apostles, and boldly professed their faith in Christ. Among these there was "a great multitude of Grecian" proselytes, (who were more open to conviction than the native Jews;) and "of the chief women also not a few." Who does not congratulate these happy converts on the change that then took place within them? Even in this world, their happiness was greatly augmented: but what has been their state since they entered into the eternal world? Who can reflect on that, and not rejoice on their account? or who must not wish that all who now heard the Gospel, might experience the same blessed effects upon their souls? — — —]

Others opposed the truth with all their might—

[Here we see how "Christ came, not to give peace on earth, but rather division." As amongst his own hearers there were divisions, "some saying that he was a just man, and others, that he deceived the people;" so it was wherever his Gospel was preached by the Apostles; and so it is wherever it is preached at this day.

But who were his opponents? Who? they were "certain lewd fellows of the baser sort." It is true that many of a different description were amongst the fiercest opposers of their doctrine; but the people here described were ever ready to lend themselves as instruments of persecution, and to carry into effect whatever the malice of their superiors could suggest. And such is the description of people who at this day are foremost in opposing the Gospel of Christ. The most abandoned characters, people who neither fear God nor regard man, will unite together to disturb the worship of Christ, or to procure the intervention of the civil power to suppress it. Not that they will oppose the Gospel *as good*: no: they will decry it as evil: they will represent the preachers of it as "turning the world upside down," and as enemies

to

to civil government. This has been the device of wicked men in all ages[l]: and it is still the ground of accusation which they bring against the godly, wherever the Gospel is attended with success. They are envious at the influence obtained by those who preach the Gospel, and at the happiness of those who embrace it; and therefore they labour to silence the one, and to turn aside the other. To effect their purposes, they raise "an uproar," and then represent the godly as the causes of that uproar; and endeavour to incense against them every one who may be able to obstruct their progress. Let not such conduct then surprise us; for it was foretold, as soon as the Saviour came into the world, that he should be a butt of contradiction, "a sign that should be spoken against," and that he should be "set, no less for the fall, than for the rising again, of many in Israel:" and therefore we must expect to find, wherever he is exhibited in his true character, that he is a stumbling-block to those who will not flee to him as their sanctuary[m].]

From this subject we may LEARN,

1. That the Scriptures are the only just standard of truth—

[It is curious to observe, how continually, and how confidently, the Apostles refer to the Scriptures of the Old Testament. "What saith the Scripture?" is the question to which they recur for the settlement of every difficulty and every dispute[n]. Happy it is for us that we have a standard so plain, so accessible, so universally received. Let us bring every sentiment to that test, and try it by that touchstone ——— "If men speak not according to the written word, there is no light in them[o]."]

2. That the knowledge of Christ, as dying and rising again for us, is the one appointed mean of salvation—

[It was with Jews that the Apostle argued: yet the Jews did worship the only true God, and professed to reverence his holy law. But when the Gospel was fully preached, the Jew could no longer be saved by the observance of his own law: he must embrace the Gospel, and look to Christ as the Messiah, the Saviour of the world. Thus also must all act who bear the Christian name: they must not be contented with an outward conformity to the Gospel, but must embrace it

[l] Compare ver. 7. with Esth. iii. 8.
[m] Isai. viii. 14. with Luke ii. 34.
[n] Rom. iv. 3. & xi. 2. Gal. iv. 30. So also Rom. ix. 17. & x. 11. & 1 Tim. v. 18.
[o] Rom. viii. 20.

it as "all their salvation and all their desire." As for the opposition that is made to the life and power of the Gospel, it is rather an argument in its favour than otherwise: for thus the Gospel ever has been treated; and thus it will be, as long as there shall be an ungodly man upon earth. But, if the whole world should rise up against it, let it be our endeavour to receive it in our hearts, to confess it with our lips, and to adorn it with our lives.]

DCCCLXXXIII.

A DAY APPOINTED FOR CHRIST TO JUDGE THE WORLD.

Acts xvii. 31. *He hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world by that Man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead.*

IN order to form a just estimate of the benefits which we have received from revelation, we must not look to the sentiments of philosophers in this day, but to those which were entertained by the wisest of the Heathen world. Modern philosophers, even while they pretend to despise the Sacred Oracles, have derived from them, either immediately or remotely, all that light which has elevated them above the Heathen. We must therefore go back to the Sages of Greece and Rome, who had no other guide than unassisted reason. Among them we shall find the most astonishing ignorance respecting truths which, amongst us, are universally received, and familiar to the meanest capacities. Athens had been the most distinguished seat of learning in the world; and even at the time when this history was written, was still in very high repute: yet there did the most stupid idolatry prevail, insomuch that the number of idols there was greater than in any other city in the world. Their wise men, not content with deifying almost every thing that could come into their minds, raised an altar TO THE UNKNOWN GOD: from which circumstance St. Paul took occasion to "make known to them HIM, whom they thus ignorantly worshipped."

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His address to them on the occasion forms a lively contrast with the abstruse speculations and vain reasonings which universally prevailed among them. He told them that there was one God, who was the Creator and Governor of all things, who claimed from them a spiritual worship, and whom exclusively they were bound to serve; who also had appointed a day in the which he would judge the world by that Man whom he had ordained, even Jesus, whom he had raised from the dead.

We do not see in this address any just ground for those extravagant encomiums that have been past upon it, as though it was the summit of human eloquence: but we account it a sober, judicious, luminous exposition of the first principles of true religion; well adapted to inform the minds of his audience, and to dispel the vain imaginations with which they had hitherto been blinded.

The point to which we shall direct our attention at this time, is the assurance here given us of a future judgment. The assertions contained in our text are two;

I. That there is a day fixed in which the world shall be judged—

The day of judgment is certainly fixed—

[" Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world:" much more therefore must so important a work as that of judging the world be fixed in the Divine counsels. It is true, the period is not known to any human Being, nor to any angel in heaven; no, nor even to the Son of Man himself; at least it was not made known to him as man, for the purpose of revealing it to the world[a]. But it is every moment approaching; and will come as unexpectedly upon the world as the deluge did, or as it would do if it were to arrive at this moment[b].]

On its arrival, the whole race of mankind shall be called to judgment—

[All the successive generations of men, from Adam to that very hour, shall be called forth from their graves[c]. Their

[a] Mark xiii. 32. [b] Matt. xxiv. 37—42.
[c] John v. 28, 29. Rev. xx. 12, 13.

Their respective bodies, however long ago, and in whatever various manner, they may have been consumed, shall be restored to life, and be united to their souls; the personal identity of every individual being preserved, and every one answering for the things which he himself did in the body.

As to the difficulties which may be supposed to prevent the execution of this design, it is sufficient to say, that God has pledged himself to accomplish it: and he who formed the whole creation out of nothing at first, will find no difficulty in re-uniting the scattered atoms of his creatures at the last day.]

The judgment shall then be passed on them in perfect righteousness—

[The actions of all will then be weighed in a perfect balance. Every thing that tended to enhance the value of them, or aggravate their malignity, shall be taken into consideration; and the quality of them be ascertained with the utmost precision. Every word, every thought, yea, every imagination or counsel of the heart, shall then be brought to light, and have weight in augmenting our happiness or misery to all eternity[d]. The rewards indeed will be rewards of grace; but still our good works shall be the measure according to which they shall be bestowed upon us: our punishments, on the other hand, will be proportioned exactly to our guilt and demerit: nor shall there be a creature in the universe who shall not acknowledge the equity of the Judge in these proceedings[e].]

The foregoing truths were revealed, though with comparative obscurity, to the Jews: but in the New Testament, in addition to the fuller revelation of it there given of it, we are informed,

II. That Christ is the person by whom that judgment will be dispensed—

The Father, we are told, "hath committed all judgment to the Son," and "given him authority to execute judgment, because he is the Son of man[f]:" and this appointment is in many respects desirable—

[It is desirable *for the vindication of his honour.*—Though he was the Son of God, "the brightness of his Father's glory, and the express image of his person," yet was he accounted "a worm and no man, a reproach of men, and despised of the people." But in that day will his reproach be rolled away; and he will appear in his true character, "King of kings, and Lord of lords"———

It

[d] Rom. ii. 16. 1 Cor. iv. 5 [e] Rev. xv. 3. [f] John v. 22, 27.

It is desirable also *for the humiliation of his enemies.*—How will they, who so triumphed in his destruction, stand appalled, when they shall see "the stone which they rejected, become the head-stone of the corner!" when they shall behold him seated on his throne, and hear him say, "Bring hither those that were mine enemies, who would not that I should reign over them, and slay them before me!"

It is desirable also *for the comfort of his people.*—Unspeakable is the comfort of reflecting, that He who was our Saviour will be our Judge. If we believe in him, and confide in his promises, will he deceive us? If we plead the merit of his blood, will he not admit that plea? Yea, will he not rather be a witness for us in that day, that, whilst we were in this world, we "lived by faith in the Son of God, as having loved us, and given himself for us?"———]

Nor is it less certain, than it is desirable—

["God has given us assurance of it, in that he has raised up Christ from the dead." Had Jesus not been raised, we might well have doubted all that he had spoken respecting his future advent: but this was such a confirmation of his word as did not admit a doubt: it was a proof that could not be counterfeited, and that must carry conviction to every mind. However strange, therefore, our Lord's predictions respecting his second coming must have appeared to those who saw him only as a poor despised man[g], and however confident his judges were in pronouncing such assertions to be blasphemy[h], we may be fully assured, that all judgment is committed to him, and that we shall all stand at his judgment-seat, to receive from him our final doom.]

Since then this awful day is fixed in the Divine counsels, and is so rapidly approaching, let us indulge the following REFLECTIONS:

1. How earnestly should we engage in the great work of repentance!

[This is a work necessary for every Child of man: and "God hath *commanded* all men everywhere to repent." He will no longer "*wink at*" our blind security: he has now given us the last and fullest revelation of his will; and, if we improve it not to the salvation of our souls, he will visit us with his heaviest displeasure[i]. Let us not, like the Apostle's auditors, "*mock*" at these tidings, or *defer* the attention they deserve[k]: but let us "seek the Lord whilst he may be found, and call upon him whilst he is near." We "know the terrors of

[g] Luke xiii. 3. Rev. xiv. 10, 11.
[h] ver. 32.
[i] 2 Cor. v, 10, 11.
[k] Gal. vi. 7, 8.

of the Lord; and therefore we would persuade you," by every consideration that can influence the mind of man[l].]

2. How carefully should we guard against self-deception!

[We easily deceive ourselves; but we cannot deceive our God. Hence St. Paul gives us this solemn caution; "Be not deceived: God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap: he that soweth to the flesh, shall of the flesh reap corruption; and he that soweth to the Spirit, shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting[m]." Surely, if we will investigate the point with any degree of candour, it will be no difficult matter to ascertain whether we are sowing to the flesh, or to the Spirit——Let us deal faithfully then with our own souls; and "judge ourselves, that we may not be judged of the Lord."]

3. How diligently should we maintain communion with our risen Saviour!

[To walk with him now by faith, is the sure way to be prepared for his future advent. He will now communicate to us of the abundance of his grace: he will shed abroad his love in our hearts: he will manifest himself to us as he does not unto the world. If we belong to him, we may regard him as "our Forerunner, gone before to prepare a place for us," and coming again shortly to receive us to himself, that where he is, we may be also. The true light in which to view him is that which is shadowed forth to us by the High Priest going into the holy place to offer incense; whilst the people waited for him without, till he should come forth to bless them[l]. Let us then wait and look for him, and he will soon come the second time to our complete and everlasting salvation[m].]

[l] Luke i. 9, 10, 21. [m] Heb. ix. 28.

DCCCLXXXIV.

THE CHARACTER OF GALLIO.

Acts xviii. 17. *And Gallio cared for none of those things.*

WE are assured that not one jot or tittle of God's word has ever failed, or ever can fail. But, for the trial of our faith, and for the more abundant manifestation of his own truth and faithfulness, God is often pleased to let events of so dark a nature arise, that

that it shall appear almost impossible for his word to receive its accomplishment. Thus he did in relation to the Israelites in Egypt. He had promised to Abraham, that before the expiration of four hundred and thirty years, he would bring his posterity out of Egypt. The time appointed had just arrived, when he sent his servants, Moses and Aaron, to lead them forth; but, so far from succeeding in their efforts, they only augmented the labours and sufferings of their oppressed countrymen: and, when the very last day had arrived, they were plainly warned by Pharaoh, that, if they attempted to come into his presence again, they should die. What now must become of the veracity of God? Did his word fall to the ground? No: *that very night* did God send a judgment, which caused the Egyptians to thrust them out. In like manner did the Lord Jesus act towards the apostle Paul. It should seem that Paul had felt discouraged at the little success of his labours during his long stay of a year and six months at Corinth; and that he had begun to yield to some desponding fears. Our blessed Lord, for his encouragement, appeared to him in a vision, and told him, he should be successful in planting a large Church there, and that "*none should set on him to hurt him.*" But behold, "when Gallio was deputy of Achaia, the Jews made insurrection with one accord against Paul, and brought him to the judgment-seat, saying, This fellow persuadeth men to worship God contrary to the law." Here it is manifest that *they did* "*set on him*," and that too with the most brutal ferocity: but did they "*hurt* him?" No: the Governor would not listen to their complaints. This occasioned a great tumult in the court, insomuch that the Greeks took Sosthenes, the Ruler of the synagogue, and beat *him* before the judgment-seat. Why did they not, in their rage, beat *Paul?* Why did they wreak their vengeance on a friend of Paul's, and not on Paul himself? God's word had been pledged for *Paul;* and therefore not a hair of his head could be touched.

Gallio,

Gallio, who should have been Paul's protector, "*cared for none of those things*:" but God cared for Paul; and it was impossible for man to "*hurt* him." The indifference of Gallio left Paul entirely at the mercy of his enemies: but "the word of God could not be broken;" and therefore Paul was as safe from injury, as he would have been even in heaven itself.

The account here given of Gallio is deserving of particular consideration; and the rather, as very different opinions have been formed respecting it. We propose therefore,

I. To form an estimate of his character—

It is not so much from a single expression that we are to form our judgment, as from a view of all the circumstances under which he acted, and all the persons with whom he had to do. It will be proper to notice his character,

1. As exhibited in his conduct on this occasion—

[Gallio acted in a double capacity, as *a man*, and as *a Magistrate*. In his *official* character, whilst we applaud his moderation, we think him highly deserving of blame. As a Governor, even if no reference had been made to him, he should have endeavoured to prevent an innocent man from being oppressed by an enraged multitude, and should have required the criminality of Paul to be established before any punishment should be inflicted on him: but when a direct reference was made to him for judgment, he should on no account have left him at the mercy of his enemies. What though he did not feel himself competent to decide the points at issue between them; he might easily see whether the points at issue were of such importance to the public welfare as to demand a judicial examination; and, if necessary, he might have appointed a commission of persons qualified to examine it under his sanction and authority. At all events, he should not have left the people to take the law into their own hands. In relation to Sosthenes also he was highly criminal: for a Magistrate ought on no account to suffer such an open and flagrant violation of the law, as that which took place in the very seat of judgment. A Magistrate should "not bear the sword in vain: he is God's representative and vice-gerent upon earth; and he ought to be both "a terror to evil-doers, and a praise to them that do well." In shrinking from

from the execution of his office, whether through indolence or fear, he violates his duty both to God and man.

Nor do we more approve of him in his *personal* conduct, as a man. He had long heard of Paul, and of the wonderful exertions he made in propagating what he professed to be a revelation from heaven. We can make some allowance for a Governor, circumstanced as Gallio was, not sending to Paul to get information from him respecting the doctrines he preached: but now God had sent the man into his very presence; and Paul was actually about to declare those very truths, which Gallio should have earnestly desired to hear: yet, when "God had given him this price to get wisdom, he knew not how to use it." Here then we blame him exceedingly: his indifference here betrayed a total want of all religion, and an utter disregard of all that should have been interesting to an immortal Being. The historian evidently intends to fix a stigma upon him; and Gallio well deserved it: and, as long as the world shall stand, he will be the representative of all who are regardless of their eternal interests.]

2. As compared with the other characters with whom he had to do—

[We pass over Sosthenes and his persecutors, because we cannot absolutely determine who they were: but we think that Sosthenes had shewn himself desirous of screening Paul; and that the Greeks were instigated by the Jews to vent their rage on *him*, because *he*, who, as Ruler of their synagogue, might have been expected most warmly to espouse their cause, had now begun to take part against them.

The other two parties are *the persecuting Jews*, and *the persecuted Apostle*. In comparison of the former, Gallio appears to advantage: for *they* were seeking to destroy a man merely for his *opinions*, and for *endeavouring, in a peaceful way, to disseminate those opinions*; whereas *he* was tolerant, and refused to sanction so unreasonable a proceeding. He justly distinguished between gross violations of the law, which no Government should tolerate, and certain differences of opinion which might consist with the undiminished welfare of society. As a friend to toleration therefore, he merits our applause: and we regret that those who professed themselves the people of God, were so inferior to a Heathen in appreciating and upholding the rights of man.

But if we compare him with the persecuted Apostle, he sinks to the lowest state of degradation. Behold the Apostle! it was his "care for these things" that involved him in all his trouble: had he been content to go to heaven alone, he might

might have avoided all these bitter persecutions. But he knew the value of an immortal soul; and was "willing to endure all things for the elect's sake, that they might obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory." He went everywhere to search out men whom he might instruct in the way to heaven: whereas Gallio, with that very instructor in his presence, would not even trouble himself so much as to hear what he had to say. He accounted Christianity as no other than a strife about words, and therefore undeserving his notice. Unhappy man, to have so little concern for thine immortal soul, and such a brutish indifference about thine eternal welfare! The ox and the ass will condemn thee for thy stupidity and folly.]

Such being our estimate of Gallio's character, we proceed,

II. To deduce from it some lessons of instruction—

His character not being wholly destitute of what, in a comparative view at least, may be approved, we shall deduce our lessons,

1. From the better part of his character—

[Two things we may learn from this; namely, *not to indulge a spirit of intolerance*; and, *not to be carried away by popular resentment.*

That a political necessity may exist for *withholding certain privileges* from some, is beyond a doubt: but nothing can justify the *inflicting of pains and penalties* upon any, on account of their religious sentiments. Man is, not only at liberty, but bound, to worship God according to his conscience: nor is any man in the universe authorized to obstruct him, unless there be something in his conduct contrary to good morals, or to the public peace. In the nation at large, this is well understood and practised: but amongst individuals there are many who would be as intolerant as the Jews of old, if the laws did not protect the persons who differ from them. This however is a hateful spirit, and on no account to be countenanced or indulged.

On the other hand, there are many who are too easily influenced by popular opinion; and who would rather consent to the oppressing of a religious character, than withstand the public voice in his support. But if we suffer the cause of Christ and his people to be run down, because we have not courage to defend it, we are more guilty far than Gallio: we are like to Pilate, who, to pacify the Jews, and save his own credit with the Roman Emperor, delivered up Jesus to the will of his blood-thirsty enemies. True indeed, we ought not

not to proceed in the violent and haughty manner that Gallio did: there are different ways of doing the same thing: we may act with suavity, though we comply not with the requisitions made to us: and this is the way in which we should act, whenever any attempts are made to prejudice our minds against God and his people: we should resolutely withstand the efforts of ungodly men, and maintain against all opposition the immutable laws of equity and love.]

2. From that part of his character which is unquestionably bad—

[Here also we will mention two things; namely, *not to be indifferent about the concerns of others*, and *not to be lukewarm in the concerns of our own souls*.

Doubtless we are not to be "busy-bodies in other men's matters;" but, on the other hand, we are not to say, "Am I my brother's keeper?" We are told "not to look every man on his own things; but every man also on the things of others[a]." If in *temporal* matters we can benefit our fellow-creatures, we are "debtors to them," to do them all the good in our power. And, if we may advance their *spiritual* interests, we should account no labours too great, nor any sufferings too heavy to be encountered in so good a cause. This sentiment has of late gained a currency in this kingdom, beyond all that could ever have been expected. What exertions have not been made in sending Missions to the Heathen; in disseminating the holy Scriptures throughout the world; and in educating the children of the poor, that they may be able to read the words of life! For the children of Abraham also, that debased, but highly interesting people, are efforts now used; and, we trust, will be used to a yet greater extent amongst us. The concern expressed also through the land for our fellow-subjects in India is highly creditable to the nation. But still there is abundant room for the display of our benevolence in every place where our lot is cast: and we cannot but earnestly pray, that it may no longer be said of any amongst us, "They mind every man his own things, and not the things that are Jesus Christ's[b]."

But, in order to maintain a zeal for the good of others, we must begin at home, and cherish a concern for our own souls. To keep the garden of others will be of little avail, if we neglect to cultivate our own[c]. The salvation of our own souls must be our first and great concern: in comparison of this, the whole world should be of no value in our eyes. Let us then regard the Lord Jesus Christ, and an interest in him, as "the pearl of great price," for which we are readily to part with

[a] Phil. ii. 4. [b] ib. ver. 21. [c] Cant. i. 6.

with all we possess. "Whatever our hand findeth to do in reference to our eternal state, let us do it with all our might." Let us *strive* to enter in at the strait gate;" remembering, that "many *seek* to enter in, but are not able." Let us bear in mind, that no rank or station of life can exempt us from the duty of "caring for these things." About the things of this world we may relax our care: there are few who do not run into a criminal excess in their attention to them: in reference to them, we think no anxiety too great, no labour too abundant; whilst the interests of the soul are deemed unworthy of any care. We mean not that worldly things are to be neglected; but that, whilst we are "not slothful in business, we should be fervent in spirit, serving the Lord."]

DCCCLXXXV.

CHARACTER AND MINISTRY OF APOLLOS.

Acts xviii. 24—28. *And a certain Jew named Apollos, born at Alexandria, an eloquent man, and mighty in the Scriptures, came to Ephesus. This man was instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in spirit, he spake and taught diligently the things of the Lord, knowing only the baptism of John. And he began to speak boldly in the synagogue: whom, when Aquila and Priscilla had heard, they took him unto them, and expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly. And when he was disposed to pass into Achaia, the Brethren wrote, exhorting the disciples to receive him: who, when he was come, helped them much, who had believed through grace: for he mightily convinced the Jews, and that publickly, shewing by the Scriptures that Jesus was Christ.*

IT is a weighty saying of our Lord, "To him that hath, shall be given; and from him that hath not, shall be taken away that which he seemeth to have." Universal experience attests the truth of this: the man who has talents of any kind will improve them by use, and lose them in a great measure by neglect. In religion especially this law of our nature obtains: indeed it obtains in religion more than in any thing else; because, in addition to the gain or loss which the cultivation or neglect of any thing will of necessity occasion, God himself will interpose in the things which relate to him, either

to

to reward the observance of them by a further communication of his blessings, or to punish the neglect of them by a withdrawment of his grace. Of the former of these, namely, the increase of well-employed talents, we have an instance in the history before us. Apollos, when he began to serve the Lord, had but a very contracted view of the things which he proposed to teach: but God so ordered it, that his exertions in the cause of religion should introduce him to the acquaintance with Aquila and Priscilla, and be the means of bringing him to the full knowledge, and complete enjoyment, of the Gospel of Christ.

In the account here given of him, we notice,

I. His qualifications for the Ministry—

These were certainly of the highest order: he possessed many qualities admirably suited to the work in which he was engaged. They were of two kinds;

1. Intellectual—

[He had a natural gift of *eloquence*; I say, a natural gift; because it was a faculty distinct from that which may be acquired by study. Some men have in the very constitution of their minds a facility of conceiving clearly, and expressing readily, whatever they wish to impart. Some, however learned they may be, can never acquire that which we call eloquence; they have some embarrassments which they cannot surmount, or some deficiencies which they cannot supply. Others, with very little learning, can talk fluently and perspicuously upon any subject, on which they have bestowed the smallest attention. This is a valuable talent, especially to any one who is called to instruct or persuade others——— and happy was Apollos in the pre-eminent measure of it which he possessed.

But, besides this, he was *well versed in the knowledge of the holy Scriptures.* "He was mighty in the Scriptures," being able to bring them to bear upon any point which he wished to discuss, and to shew from them what was agreeable to the mind and will of God. "The word dwelt richly in him in all wisdom"——— This also is of the utmost importance to one who undertakes to teach others, since the Sacred Volume is the armoury from whence he must take all the

weapons for his warfare, and the treasury from whence alone he can procure the riches which he undertakes to dispense.]

2. Moral—

[He was "*fervent in spirit;*" glowing with zeal for the honour of his God, and ardently longing for the salvation of his fellow-creatures — — — This in a Minister is indispensable: the difficulties which he will have to encounter, are very great, and fervour of spirit is necessary to carry him through them; nor can he hope to be extensively useful to others, unless he lay himself out in the service of God to the utmost of his power.

To this was added that most amiable of all graces, *humility of mind.* Notwithstanding his natural talents and eminent acquirements, he was willing to be instructed by any one who could advance him in the knowledge of the Lord. Aquila was only a mechanic, and not invested with the sacred office of a teacher: yet when he and his wife Priscilla invited Apollos to their house in order to "expound to him the way of God more perfectly," Apollos thankfully accepted their invitation, and diligently availed himself of their instructions. This is an excellence rarely found in persons who are high in popular estimation: the admiration with which they are honoured, too often puffs them up with vain conceit, and indisposes them to learn from those, whom they regard as their inferiors in station or attainments: but the more rarely such docility is found, the more highly should it be appreciated, and the more carefully should it be maintained.]

Thus endowed, he greatly distinguished himself by,

II. His Ministerial exertions—

He improved for God whatever talents he possessed—

[When he was only partially "instructed in the way of the Lord," and knew nothing more than what he had learned from John the Baptist, he instructed others to the utmost of his power with great *boldness,* and *diligence.* The doctrines which John the Baptist had preached were in direct opposition to the habits of the world, and were sure to call forth the enmity of those who would not part with their sins: but Apollos feared not the face of man; but both "spake" *in private,* and "taught" *in public,* and that too with unremitting activity, the things which he considered as of such vital importance to the welfare of mankind. When he himself was more fully instructed, he desired to extend the sphere of his labours, and to proceed to Corinth, to supply, as he was able,

the

the place of Paul. Then especially did he make Christ the one great theme of all his discourses. "The things of the Lord," as far as he understood them, he had before declared: he had warned men of the Messiah's advent, and had called them to repent, in order to get their hearts duly prepared for a suitable reception of him: but now he saw, not only that the Messiah was come, but that Jesus of Nazareth was he, and had done and suffered all those things which had been predicted of him. Thus, in the scope of his ministrations, he determined, with the apostle Paul, to "know nothing but Jesus Christ, and him crucified:" and, though we have not the same occasion to prove the Messiahship of Christ, since that is universally acknowledged amongst us, yet are we called to magnify the importance of that truth, and to commend it to men's attention, as the source of all their happiness.]

In his labours he was useful to many souls—

[He "mightily convinced the Jews," so as to stop the mouths of some of the more obdurate, and to bring the more candid of them to the acknowledgement of the truth. Nor were his labours of little service to the Church of God: on the contrary "he helped *them* much, who had believed through grace." It was through the operation of Divine grace alone that any had believed: "whether Paul planted, or Apollos watered, it was God alone that gave the increase:" but still, it was no slight benefit to the garden of the Lord to be watered by such a hand as his: and no doubt he contributed greatly both to the growth and fruitfulness of those trees of righteousness which God's right hand had planted.]

ADDRESS,

1. To those who labour in the Ministry, or are preparing for it—

[Let Apollos serve as a guide for you. If you possess good natural talents, account it your honour to consecrate them to the service of your God. And, in the employment of them, do not inquire where you may gain most credit to yourselves, or most consult your present ease and interests, but inquire rather where you may do most good; and be ready to exercise your Ministry wherever the providence of God may call you. Moreover, if called to labour, where a more honoured servant of the Lord has gone before you, do not draw back through a pretended sense of your own insufficiency; but be willing to have your talents and services undervalued, and to be nothing yourselves, that God may be all in all.]

2. To

2. To those who have received good by the Ministry—

[To God you must ascribe the praise for all that you have received; since to whomsoever you are indebted as an instrument, the benefit proceeds from God alone, who "gives to every man" according to his own sovereign will and pleasure. It is possible that you who have long known the Lord, may be called to attend the Ministry of one who may be comparatively a novice in the ways of God; and you may be tempted on that account to despise him in your hearts, and to lower him in the estimation of those around you. This, alas! is the conduct of many; but it is a most sinful conduct, and utterly unworthy of their Christian profession. Instead of indulging such a proud contemptuous spirit, you should rejoice in every appearance of good, and endeavour to impart to him a fuller knowledge of the truth. This would render good service both to God and man: and it is a service which all may render, if only with meekness and modesty they watch for an opportunity, and look up to God for his blessing on their endeavours. And who can tell how "much you yourselves may be helped" afterwards by him, to whom you have been helpful in the first instance? It is worthy of observation, that Aquila did not commence preacher at Corinth, notwithstanding his clear knowledge of the Gospel, and notwithstanding Paul had just left the place: he did not think himself authorized to take on him an office to which he was not called: but he laboured in private conversation, and was made eminently useful in that way: and we cannot but recommend to every one amongst you, whether male or female, to imitate this pious couple in a modest unassuming carriage, and in an affectionate concern for the best interests of mankind.]

DCCCLXXXVI.

THE POWER OF CHRIST AND HIS GOSPEL.

Acts xix. 15. *And the evil spirit answered and said, Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are ye?*

GREAT effects are wrought by the Gospel, whereever it is preached with faithfulness and zeal: churches are filled, sinners are awakened, saints are edified, and the name of the Lord Jesus is magnified. But, in those who feel not its influence, there is an universal proneness to ascribe these effects to other causes

causes than those from which they really proceed. Some consider them as arising from the manner in which the preacher addresses his audience; from the loudness of his voice, for instance, or from the earnestness of his gestures: others ascribe them to the enthusiastic sentiments with which his discourses are filled, or perhaps to the terribleness of his denunciations. Any reason, however absurd, will be resorted to by them, rather than they will acknowledge the hand of God in these things. Thus it was in the days of old: when our blessed Lord cast out devils from people who were possessed, the spectators ascribed his works to a confederacy with Satan, rather than to the agency of the Spirit of God. In like manner, when his Apostles cast out devils in his name, many supposed that they wrought their miracles by means of magical incantations. Hence some, and, in particular, seven sons of a Jewish priest, thought by the use of the name of Jesus to produce the same effects. But Satan soon shewed them their mistake; infusing a more than human strength and courage into the man whom he possessed, and falling upon the seven exorcists with such irresistible fury, as to convince all, that he could be vanquished only by an almighty arm. His address of defiance, which we have just read, will lead me to set before you,

I. The power of Christ and his Gospel—

When Satan had prevailed over our first parents, a promise was given that the Son of God should become incarnate, and bruise the head of that serpent that had beguiled them[a]. Accordingly, Christ came in due season to effect for men the promised deliverance: and he accomplished it,

1. Personally—

[The first encounter which he had with our great adversary was in the wilderness, just previous to his entering upon his public labours; and there, after withstanding his repeated assaults, he drove him, as it were, from the field of battle, saying, "Get thee behind me, Satan." During the course of his Ministry, he exerted an irresistible power over this wicked fiend,

[a] Gen. iii. 15.

fiend, expelling him from multitudes whom he had possessed, and constraining him to confess himself a vanquished enemy[b]. Towards the close of his life he experienced the yet fiercer assaults of Satan, attended by all the hosts of hell: "This," says our Lord to the Jews, "is your hour, and the power of darkness:" but he triumphed over them, agreeably to that word, "Now shall the prince of this world be cast out;" now shall "the prince of this world be judged[c]." Upon the cross indeed he appeared to suffer a defeat: but there, and there chiefly, he gained the victory: "through death he overcame him that had the power of death, that is, the devil[d];" yea, upon the cross, "he spoiled principalities and powers, and made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it[e]." In his resurrection and ascension he completed his triumphs, "leading captivity captive[f]," and "putting all his enemies under his feet[g]."]

2. By the Ministry of others—

[When first our blessed Lord sent forth his twelve Apostles, he gave them a commission, not to preach only, but to "cast out devils[h]:" and to such an extent did they execute this, that they were quite surprised, and said with wonder, "Lord, even the devils are subject to us through thy name:" to which our Lord replied, "I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven[i]." We have lately seen that St. Paul cast out a spirit of divination[k]; and in the chapter from whence our text is taken, we are told, that handkerchiefs or aprons were carried from the body of Paul, and were made effectual by the power of God to the casting out of many evil spirits[l]. In ejecting them from the *souls* of men he was more honoured than any other of the Apostles. When first he received a commission to preach the Gospel, it was said to him by our Lord, "I send thee to turn men from darkness unto light, and *from the power of Satan* unto God[m]:" and how successful he was in destroying Satan's empire, and in enlarging the kingdom of Christ upon earth, his history, as recorded in the New Testament, together with his different epistles, abundantly testify. For many hundreds of years, it must be confessed, this great adversary of God and man has re-established his dominion almost over the whole world, as well where Christ is named, as in those regions where the light of his Gospel has never shined. But still the Lord Jesus has not left himself without witness, that he has vanquished Satan, and can render the weakest of his people victorious over

[b] Mark i. 27.
[c] John xii. 31. & xvi. 11.
[d] Heb. ii. 14.
[e] Col. ii. 15.
[f] Eph. iv. 8.
[g] Ps. cx. 1.
[h] Mark iii. 14, 15.
[i] Luke x. 17, 18.
[k] Ch. xvi. 18.
[l] ver. 12.
[m] Ch. xxvi. 18.

over him: "his word is yet quick and powerful, and sharper than a two-edged sword;" and it is still as "mighty as ever to pull down the strong-holds of sin, and to cast down every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of Christ[n]." Indeed at this very hour the Lord Jesus is "riding on in the chariot of the everlasting Gospel, conquering and to conquer;" so that Satan must still repeat his former acknowledgment, "Jesus I know, and Paul I know:" yes, he does know, that Christ is "Lord of lords and King of kings," and that "his Gospel is still the power of God unto the salvation" of men.]

But though Christ and his Gospel are so powerful, experience proves,

II. The insufficiency of all created power to eject Satan—

None but that stronger man, the Lord Jesus, has ever been able to prevail against "the strong man armed:" Till attacked by the Lord Jesus, "Satan keepeth his goods in peace:" He defies,

1. All false religions—

[Go back to the days of old; What was effected by any of the philosophers of Greece or Rome? They did not even themselves experience a sanctifying efficacy from their own doctrines; and much less did they prevail to destroy the power of Satan in the hearts of their disciples. Look at the votaries of Pagan idolatry, or Mahometan delusion: What evidence do they shew that their principles have made them victorious over Satan? We may safely affirm, that the very means which they use for obtaining the Divine favour, serve only to rivet on them more forcibly those chains of Satan wherewith they are bound———].

2. A nominal profession of the true religion—

[The Lord Jesus did, for wise and gracious purposes, suffer many to "cast out devils in his name," whom yet he will banish from his presence in the day of judgment, and exclude for ever from his heavenly kingdom[o]. But never did any person cast out Satan from his heart by merely naming the name of Christ. We need only look on the Christian world, and we shall see how little a mere profession of Christianity can effect. The generality of Christians are in reality little better than baptized Heathens. There are some few points of morality in which they may differ from the Heathen; but in all the more common sins, of pride, lewdness, covetousness, together with the whole band of spiritual and fleshly lusts,

[n] 2 Cor. x. 4, 5. [o] Matt. vii. 22, 23.

lusts, they are as much enslaved by them as any Heathen can be. In proof of this, we need not cast our eyes on others: we need only inspect the workings of our own hearts, and we shall have abundant evidence of this melancholy truth — — —]

3. All self-righteousness or self-confident exertions—

[To these men generally resort in the first instance, when they desire to overcome this wicked fiend. But he derides their efforts as weak and vain: he well knows that human power, however strenuously exerted, will prove only like Elisha's staff, which could not re-animate the breathless corpse on which it was laid [p]. To all such efforts he says in his heart, "Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are ye?" It should seem indeed, that men, feeling the authority of God's law, and the terrors of his wrath, should be able to effect any thing: but our arm is paralysed, and we cannot stretch it forth, unless the Lord Jesus Christ himself enable us. Hence we are told, that "what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sent his own Son to effect, namely, to condemn sin in the flesh, and to cause that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us [q]." We need only call to mind the case of Peter, to convince us, that our strongest resolutions are only as tow before the fire, when we are under the influence of any violent temptation; and that, unless the Lord Jesus strengthen our faith, Satan will sift us as wheat, and manifest us to be light as chaff.]

APPLICATION—

In this subject all are interested: for though the states of men are widely different from each other, we all have to do with this great enemy, as captivated by him, or conflicting with him, or victorious over him. We will address ourselves therefore to these different classes: to,

1. The captivated—

[But where shall we find any of this description? We read indeed in the Scriptures, of some who are "taken in the snare of the devil, and are led captive by him at his will [r]:" but are there any such in our day? The idea of Satanic influence is almost expunged from modern creeds; but if we believe the Bible, we must believe that this influence still operates on the minds of men. Would we know whether it is exerted over us? it will be no difficult matter to determine this. Are we disobedient, wilfully and habitually disobedient, to any one command of God? it is Satan that instigates

[p] 2 Kin. iv. 31. [q] Rom. viii. 3. [r] 2 Tim. ii. 26.

gates us to that rebellion[s]. Are we ignorant of the Gospel as our one source of life, and peace, and holiness? it is Satan that blinds our eyes, and keeps us from beholding the light of the knowledge of the glory of Christ[t]. Consult then the experience of your souls on these points: inquire into the liveliness of your faith, and the conformity of your practice to the word of God; and, unless you have been truly converted by the grace of Christ, you will be constrained to acknowledge, that you are under the power of that cruel adversary. View then your state, and see how deplorable it is: the condition of that poor demoniac mentioned by St. Mark, is a melancholy picture of yours, who are breaking through all the restraints of God's holy law, and inflicting the most deadly wounds upon your own souls[u]. O beg of God to shew you what a miserable state you are in, and to interpose with his almighty power for your speedy deliverance.]

2. The conflicting—

[To those amongst us who have commenced a warfare against sin and Satan, we would particularly say, Remember where your strength is: it is not in yourselves: you "have not in yourselves a sufficiency even to think a good thought:" "your sufficiency is altogether in God," and in the Lord Jesus Christ, "without whom you can do nothing[x]." Hear the voice of God to you on this subject; "Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord of Hosts[y]." Be on your guard then, "lest ye lean to your own understanding," or "trust," even in the smallest degree, "in an arm of flesh." You are indeed to "be strong;" but it must be "in the Lord, and in the power of his might[z]." You are to go forth armed; but not in armour framed by human skill; that would be to you as useless as Saul's armour was to David: there is a whole suit of armour provided for you by God; and in that you must be clothed[a]: arrayed in that, and especially taking with you the shield of faith, and the sword of the Spirit, you need not fear: Satan well "knows" the power of soldiers thus arrayed; and "he will flee from those who thus resist him[b]." Inquire of those who are now triumphant in heaven; and ask them, how they gained the victory. The answer from every one of them will be, "We overcame him by the blood of the Lamb[c]:" we trusted to that blood to "obtain mercy for us, and grace to help us in every time of need;" and we were not disappointed of our hope: we fought; we gained the victory; and "Satan was in due time bruised under our feet."]

3. The

[s] Eph. ii. 2. [t] 2 Cor. iv. 4. [u] Mark v. 2—5.
[x] 2 Cor. iii. 5. John xv. 5.
[y] Zech. iv. 6. [z] Eph. vi. 10. [a] ib. ver. 11—17.
[b] Jam. iv. 7. [c] Rev. xii. 11.

3. The victorious—

[It may seem presumptuous to speak of such in this present world; but such there are, and such, we trust, amongst us[d]. We do not indeed imagine that there are any, against whom Satan does not sometimes gain advantage; but we are persuaded that there are some amongst us who maintain a good, and a successful warfare. To such then we say, If God has made you to differ from others, give glory to that adorable Saviour, who has strengthened you by his Spirit, and enabled you to withstand so potent an enemy. To this you are called by the history before us. The failure of these presumptuous exorcists served to illustrate more fully the success of the Apostle, in and by whom the Lord Jesus wrought: and you are told, "The name of the Lord Jesus was magnified[e]." Magnify then your Saviour for every victory you gain, and say, "Not unto us, not unto us, but unto thy name be the praise." And, if you see others victorious around you, be not envious of them, because they are not of your sect or party,—as the Apostles once were[f]; but rejoice with them, and glorify God in their behalf.

But, however victorious you are, remember that you are still on the field of battle, and may, if off your guard, receive the most deadly wounds. We read of those, "whose hearts, once delivered from an evil spirit, were again occupied by seven other spirits more wicked than he; and whose last end was therefore worse than their beginning[g]." O beware, lest it prove at last thus with you! Be ever on the watch, guarding against the wiles and devices of your subtle enemy, and crying mightily to God to protect you from him.

Learn from the people who beheld the miracles of Paul: they did not put their impious books upon a shelf, but "*burned them*," and that publickly too, without any regard to their great value; determining that they should never more prove a snare to themselves, or to any other persons[h]. Deal ye thus with your besetting sins: spare not one of them, no, not for an hour; but cut off the offending hand, and pluck out the offending eye. Then shall you have daily fresh cause for praise and thanksgiving[i], and ere long obtain that crown of righteousness, which God has promised to all his faithful and victorious servants[k].]

[d] 1 John ii. 14. & v. 18. [e] ver. 17. [f] Luke ix. 49, 50.
[g] Luke xi. 24—26. [h] ver. 18, 19. [i] Rom. vii. 24, 25.
[k] 2 Tim. iv. 8. Rev. iii. 21.

DCCCLXXXVII.

HEATHENISH AND CHRISTIAN ZEAL COMPARED.

Acts xix. 34. *All with one voice, about the space of two hours, cried out, Great is Diana of the Ephesians!*

THE enmity of the human heart against God may sleep; but it is soon awakened, and called forth into action. St. Paul had continued two years at Ephesus, if not unmolested, yet protected by the power of God. But when his labours there were just finished, and he had sent away two of his attendants into Macedonia, with an intention speedily to follow them, it pleased God to withdraw from the people those restraints which he had hitherto imposed upon them, and to leave them to shew what was in their hearts. Accordingly the workmen "who made silver shrines for Diana," finding their trade lessened by the prevalence of Christianity, raised a tumult throughout the whole city, and would probably have killed Paul, if they could have laid their hands on him. In opposition to him and his doctrine, they exalted the object of their own worship, crying with one voice for the space of two hours, Great is Diana of the Ephesians!

From this circumstance we shall take occasion to notice,

I. The zeal they manifested—

This doubtless was great; but it was,

1. Blind—

[Who was Diana? What had she done for them? What could a senseless image do for them? Or what difference would there be in the power of that image, whether it was made with hands, or fell down (as they foolishly supposed) from Jupiter, who himself was only a creature of their vain imaginations? Yet for the honour of this idol are they transported beyond all bounds of sense and reason: and when Alexander beckoned to them with his hand, in order to engage their attention to what he had to say to them on the subject, they would not listen to him for a moment, but for the space of two hours cried out altogether, "Great is Diana of the Ephesians!" We wonder at the extreme blindness of these benighted Heathens: but amongst Christians there are very

very many who can give no better reason for the hope that is in them, or for the religion they profess, than those could who were so zealous for the honour of Diana.]

2. Interested—

[Demetrius, and the workmen of the like occupation with himself, pretended not to regard their gains, or at least to account them as nothing in comparison of their religion: but it is manifest, that a concern for their temporal interest was the real source of all their disquiet: and, had their gains been increased by the introduction of Christianity, instead of being diminished, they would have left to others the task of vindicating the honour of their goddess[a]. Now this gives us an insight into all the different religions that obtain in the world, not excepting even Christianity itself, as it has been debased by the great majority of its adherents. They are all founded in priestcraft. Men, with a view of exalting themselves and advancing their own interests, have invented gods, and goddesses, and ceremonies by which they were to be worshipped; and have prevailed upon their fellow-countrymen to adopt their cunningly-devised fables: and, having once gained an ascendant over the minds of others, they have contrived to inspire them with reverence and zeal for the systems thus promulged, and to secure to themselves thereby a permanent support. Hence the priests have uniformly opposed all who have attempted to rectify the errors of the people: and this is the true reason of Popery having taken so deep a root in the minds of men: the Pope and the subordinate priests find their account in upholding all the superstitions with which they have obscured the Christian faith; and the people, deluded and kept in bondage by them, are as zealous for those superstitions, as for the most important doctrines of their religion. Happy would it be if Protestant Churches also were not chargeable with the same evils: but truth compels us to acknowledge, that the fire which burns upon our Christian altars would soon languish, if it were not supplied with fuel by temporal honours and emoluments. It must be remembered, however, that the zeal which is founded in self-interest is worthless, and even hateful in the sight of God.]

3. Infuriate—

[The people were "full of wrath," and acted more like maniacs than rational Beings. "The whole city was filled with confusion;" "some cried one thing, and some another;" and "the greater part of the assembly knew not wherefore they were come together." In what a ferment must their minds

[a] See ver. 25, 27.

minds be, that they could continue for two hours that senseless cry, "Great is Diana of the Ephesians!" We read of the worshippers of Baal crying from the morning to the evening sacrifice, "O Baal, hear us!" and because he gave them no answer, "they cut themselves with knives and lancets, till the blood gushed out." In such instances as these we see, in most striking colours, the nature and effects of superstition: it debases men almost to a level with the beasts, in the ferocity of their dispositions and the absurdity of their actions: so justly does the Apostle designate its votaries "*as unreasonable and wicked men.*"]

In perfect contrast with this is,

II. The zeal which Christianity requires—

True religion must be accompanied with zeal; with a zeal proportioned, in some measure, to its supreme excellence. But Christian zeal must be,

1. Founded in knowledge—

[We should know wherein the superiority of our religion consists: we should be acquainted with its mysterious truths, and, above all, with that which constitutes its peculiar excellence—the mystery of Redemption. We should see the wisdom and goodness, the love and mercy, yea, and every perfection, of the Deity, as displayed in that stupendous mystery — — — We should see its suitableness to our wants, and its sufficiency for our necessities — — — It is from such views of it alone that true zeal will spring; or that we shall ever be led to "count all things but dung for the excellency of the knowledge of it."]

2. Regulated by love—

[True zeal should have respect only to the good of men, and the glory of God. It should be divested of all selfish intesests, and carnal passions. Self should have no concern whatever in it, any farther than the advancement of our own spiritual and eternal welfare may be comprehended under that term. In all its actings it must be regulated by a tender regard to the weaknesses and prejudices of men. It is by no means sufficient that we endeavour to approve ourselves *zealous* for God, unless we approve ourselves at the same time patient and forbearing towards men; proportioning our exertions for their welfare to their capacity for receiving our instructions; or, in other words, being content to administer milk alone to those who are not able to digest strong meat; and, like Moses, to put a veil upon our face, when the lustre of our countenance would be too strong for those who look to

us for the words of life. Never should we needlessly cast a stumbling-block in the way of any, or use our own liberty in such a way as to offend our weaker Brethren. Our aim should be, to "win souls" to Christ: and for that end we should, as far as we conscientiously can, "become all things to all men, that by all means we may save some."]

3. Tempered with discretion—

["It is good to be zealously affected always in a good thing:" but there is a zeal which is not according to knowledge." To exercise zeal aright, we should consider with care and circumspection the following things: first, *Our own office and character;* not invading the provinces of others, or assuming to ourselves a character which belongs not to us. It is not every one that has a right to act as Phinehas did, in executing vengeance upon offenders with his own hand: (Phinehas was himself a Ruler, and acted under the orders of the Supreme Magistrate: and he is commended, not so much for punishing the offenders, as for daring to punish them in the face of all Israel, whilst thousands of others were guilty of the same offence.) Nor can I conceive it at all right for persons, uneducated, and uncalled, to invade the Ministerial office, (as is so common in this day,) when we are expressly told that "no man should take this honour unto himself, but he that is called of God, as was Aaron; and that even Christ glorified not himself to be made an high priest, but was called to the office by Him who said to him, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee[b]."

Next, we should consider *The nature of the thing about which our zeal is exercised.* We should distinguish between things essential and non-essential. It would be a sad perversion of zeal to shew the same earnestness about "tithes of mint, anise, and cummin, as about the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and truth." We mean not to say, that *any* truth, or *any* duty, is of small moment; but we affirm that there is a vast distance between some truths or duties, and others; and that consequently there should be a proportionate difference between the zeal we exercise in relation to them. St. Paul "became to the weak, as weak; and to them that were without law, as without law:" he even circumcised Timothy, though he knew that the rite of circumcision was abrogated: but when the circumcision of Titus was required as necessary, he would not give place, no, not for an hour; but declared, that if even an angel from heaven should insist upon the works of the law as necessary to salvation, he should, and must, be accursed. The same sentiment applies to

[b] Heb. v. 4, 5. & Jam. iii. 1. in the Greek: διδάσκαλοι, 'teachers.'

to those doctrines of our religion which are less clearly revealed, and about which the best of men may differ; as also to those matters which relate to Church-Government, respecting which there is a great diversity of opinion amongst men of equal piety and learning. We should insist upon them, not in proportion to the interests or prejudices of any particular party, but according to the stress laid upon them in the holy Scriptures; always distinguishing between what is clear or doubtful, essential or non-essential.

There is yet another thing proper for us to consider, namely, *The best means of attaining our end.* Nothing is further from Christian simplicity than artifice of any kind. We must never attempt to "catch any man with guile." But there is an address, "a becoming all things to all men," which we shall do well to cultivate. As in warfare it often happens, that an enemy is induced by the skilful motions of his adversary to relinquish a post from which he could not have been driven by a direct attack, so, in seeking to benefit mankind, much may depend on the manner in which our efforts are conducted. We know full well, that success is of God alone; but we know also that he makes use of means suited to the end, and that he requires us to "walk in wisdom toward them that are without," and to "give no offence in any thing, that the Ministry be not blamed."]

We will conclude this subject with one or two DIRECTIONS proper for the occasion:

1. Let your zeal begin at home—

[A man's own heart is the first sphere for the exercise of zeal. To get a deeply penitent and contrite heart is an object worthy of our utmost exertions. Zeal in relation to this is expressly enjoined by our Lord himself, who could not endure the lukewarmness of the Laodicean Church[c]: and the diversified actings of that zeal are accurately described in the account given us of the Corinthian Church[d]. To devote ourselves also unreservedly to God is another exercise of zeal which deserves our earliest attention. The mortifying of every lust, the cultivating of every gracious affection, and the getting of "our whole man, body, soul, and spirit, sanctified unto the Lord[e]," *this, this* should be a prelude to our exertions in behalf of others: we should "first pluck the beam out of our own eye, before we attempt to pull out the mote that is in our brother's eye." I do not mean that we are to forbear doing any thing for God till we ourselves are perfect; (for then we shall never exert ourselves for him at all:) but we

[c] Rev. iii. 19. [d] 2 Cor. vii. 11.
[e] Rom. xii. 1, 11. Eccl. ix. 10.

we should make our first and main efforts on our own corruptions, that we may teach others by our example, as well as by our precepts.]

2. Let it be extended to all around you—

[Every man may find abundant scope for his labours in his own immediate neighbourhood; in visiting the sick, instructing the ignorant, relieving the sick, and comforting the afflicted. But some are called to more extensive spheres of usefulness: Magistrates and Ministers have a greater scope afforded them for benefiting the world. And O, how loudly do the Heathen nations call upon us for the exercise of zeal! How many in every country under heaven are saying to us, "Come over to Macedonia, and help us!" Now the office of zeal is to overlook our own ease and interests, and to find our happiness in serving God: but, alas! how little of this zeal is to be found amongst us! How few, when God is wanting Ambassadors to distant climes, are ready to say, "Here am I; send me." This is much to the shame of the Christian world. Our Lord tells us of ungodly men, that would "compass sea and land to make one proselyte" to human opinions, and we are backward to use such exertions for the conversion of multitudes to the faith of Christ. Ah! let us wipe off this reproach, and labour, all of us in our respective spheres, and according to our abilities, to promote the salvation of our fellow-men, and to advance the kingdom of Christ to the utmost ends of the earth.]

DCCCLXXXVIII.

PAUL'S SERMON AT TROAS.

Acts xx. 7. *And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them, ready to depart on the morrow; and continued his speech until midnight.*

IF we look at Christianity as it exists at this day, it appears little else than a name, and a form: but if we contemplate it as it existed in the Apostolic age, it will be found an active and invigorating principle in the minds of men, engaging all their affections, and stimulating them to the greatest exertions. As for St. Paul's labours for the propagation of the Gospel in the world, we forbear to speak of them at present, any farther than they are connected with the

the passage which is immediately before us: but his preaching from evening to midnight, and then continuing his discourse afterwards till break of day, will give us some idea of the exertions he made in the cause of Christ, and of the interest which his hearers also felt in all that related to their Christian course.

The account given of his discourse, will lead us to notice,

I. The proper employment of the Sabbath—

The Jewish Sabbath was appointed by God himself to be spent in holy exercises. On it the sacrifices were twice as numerous as on other days; and the law of Moses was read for the instruction of the people. But under the Christian dispensation, the time of its observance was changed from the seventh day of the week to the first; in commemoration of the Resurrection of our blessed Lord, and of the descent of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost. It is probable that, for a considerable time, the seventh day still continued to be observed by those who were proselyted from the Jewish religion, lest their neglect of that day should put a stumbling-block in the way of their Brethren: but the first day was that which from the beginning was held sacred by the early Christians; and it was dignified with the peculiar title of The "Lord's-day[a]." On this day the Church at Troas were assembled, to offer unto God their accustomed sacrifices of prayer and praise, and particularly "to break bread," that is, to commemorate the death of Christ agreeably to the directions given by our Lord himself on the night previous to his crucifixion. This ordinance constituted an essential part of the service on every Lord's-day: it called the attention of the Church to that great mystery which was the foundation of all their hopes, even to the body of Christ as broken for them, and the blood of Christ as shed for them. Moreover, it led them to apply

[a] Compare 1 Cor. xvi. 2. with Rev. i. 10.

apply to Christ by faith for a continued interest in his death, and a more abundant communication of his blessing to their souls.

Amongst us, the Lord's Supper is not administered so often; but our employment on the Sabbath ought to be, in fact, the same: it should consist in these two things:

1. A personal intercourse with Christ as dying for us—

[In entering into the House of Prayer, we come, it is true, to worship the Father; but we must never forget that it is only in and through Christ that we can have access to him; and that every prayer must be offered to the Father in the name of Christ — — —. We assemble, too, to hear the word of God; but it is *the Gospel*, the glad tidings of salvation through a crucified Redeemer, that we must desire to hear: and the faithful Minister will "determine to know nothing among his people, but Jesus Christ, and him crucified." If he preach the law, it will be as "a schoolmaster to bring men to Christ:" or if he insist upon any particular duty, it will be, not to lead his hearers to establish a righteousness of their own by their obedience to it, but to shew them how they are to manifest the sincerity of their faith, and how they are to glorify their God and Saviour — — — Both Minister and people must remember, that they meet, not as Mahometans, who acknowledge one God; not as Jews, who confess their obligation to obey his revealed will; but *as Christians*, who have their hopes fixed entirely on Christ, and expect every thing as the purchase of his blood. Whether the Lord's Supper is administered, or not, "Christ is to be evidently set forth crucified before us;" and "to know him," "to win him," "to be found in him;" and "to receive out of his fulness," must be the great object of our assembling together — — —]

2. A personal surrender of ourselves to him, as his redeemed people—

[When the first Christians met thus constantly "to break bread," they confessed openly, that they were disciples of that crucified Saviour; and they engaged themselves, as it were by a solemn oath, to live and die in his service. Thus do we profess, in all our solemn acts of worship, that we have been "bought with a price," even with the inestimable price of the Redeemer's blood; and that we are bound, by every possible tie, "to glorify him with our bodies and our spirits which are his" — — — We do not in general associate this idea with any thing but the Lord's Supper; but we ought to

associate

associate it with all the services of the Sabbath; and to consider ourselves as living thus upon Christ by the renewed exercises of faith, in order that we may live to Christ in the more enlarged exercise of holy obedience — — —]

Let us now proceed to notice,

II. The particular circumstances of that meeting—

The place where they were assembled was an upper chamber—

[It was a room three stories high, and so small and crowded, that the windows, even at night, were forced to be open for the admission of air, whilst some were constrained to sit in them for want of more convenient accommodation. Little do we think what a blessing it is to us that we have houses built on purpose for the service of our God. True it is that even in them the poor do not always find such commodious seats as one could wish: but, if there were no other places for our reception than such as they possessed at Troas, we fear that multitudes who now receive instruction from Sabbath to Sabbath, would never trouble themselves to seek it, where they must submit to so much inconvenience for the attainment of it.]

In that room, there were "many lights"—

[The enemies of the Church were ready to raise all manner of evil reports against the disciples; and they would gladly have represented these nocturnal meetings as scenes of much iniquity. To cut off all occasion for such calumnies, the disciples took care to have the place of their assemblies well lighted in every part; and it is probable that was for the express purpose of obviating all such remarks, that the historian recorded this otherwise unimportant fact. It teaches us, however, that we should be always on our "guard against even the appearance of evil," and "cut off occasion from them that seek occasion" against us, and "not let our good be evil spoken of."]

There Paul preached his farewell discourse—

[At what precise hour he began, we know not; but "he continued his discourse till midnight;" and after a short interruption, resumed it "till break of day." Do we wonder that he should so long detain his audience? No: the occasion was very peculiar; "he was about to depart on the morrow," never probably to see their face again: his heart was full; the subject was inexhaustible; the hearts of his audience were deeply impressed, and they drank in the word with insatiable avidity. What a glorious meeting must that have been; the preacher so animated with his subject, and the people so penetrated with

with the truths they heard! Doubtless, it would not be expedient, under common circumstances, so to lengthen out the service of our God; but, if we could always meet under similar impressions, and have our hearts so engaged, how glorious would be the ordinances, and how exalted the benefit arising from them!]

A distressing occurrence, which for a time interrupted his discourse, tended ultimately to impress it more deeply on their minds—

[A youth, named Eutychus, being overcome with sleep, "fell down out of the window from the third loft, and was taken up dead." Oh, what grief must have seized the whole assembly! ——— but the Apostle went down to him, and fell upon him, as Elijah and Elisha had done upon the persons they had raised to life, and by prayer to God prevailed for the restoration of his life. At the sight of this "they were not a little comforted." As it respected the youth, it would have been most distressing to think that he should be taken into the eternal world in such a state; as though he had been made, like Lot's wife, a warning to all future generations. But more especially were they concerned for the honour of God and his Gospel. What a stumbling-block would it have been to the ungodly, that such an accident should have been occasioned by the unreasonable length of the Apostle's discourse! How bitterly would they have inveighed against him, and against these meetings that were encouraged by him! Truly it was no little joy to have such great occasions of offence removed. But further, the miracle thus wrought before their eyes, was a striking confirmation of what they had heard: it was, as it were, *a seal* put by God himself to attest the truth of all that had been delivered to them, and *an emblem*, yea, *a pledge* and *earnest* also, of the blessings which all who received his Gospel might expect at his hands. Thus was this occurrence, so afflictive in itself, overruled for the furtherance of their joy, and for the more abundant display of God's grace and mercy.]

As an IMPROVEMENT of this subject, let us see,

1. How deep an interest we should take in the Gospel of Christ!

[It is much to be regretted that we see but little of this fervour in our religious assemblies: neither we who minister, nor you who hear, are affected with the Gospel in any measure as we ought to be. In many congregations there may be found persons sleeping, like Eutychus, though the sermon be not an hour long: and where they are not actually asleep, how

how many hear in such a drowsy, listless, inattentive manner, that they evidently take no interest in the subject, nor could give any good account of what has been spoken to them. Oh, Brethren, let it not be so with us. Let us rather come together as that assembly did; I to preach, and you to hear, as though we were never to meet again in this world. The subjects of the Apostle's discourse are as important to us, as they were to the primitive Christians: let us beg of God to impress them more deeply on our minds, that they may be to us "a savour of life unto life," and not, as they are to too many, "a savour of death unto death."]

2. How earnestly we should improve our present intercourse with each other!

[It is but a little while, at all events, that our present connexion can be continued: I must soon go to give an account of my Ministry, as you also must to answer for the way in which you have improved it: and even from Sabbath to Sabbath we know not whether the present opportunity shall not be our last. Surely this thought should make us exceeding anxious to obtain increasing edification in faith and love, that so "I may be your rejoicing, and you be mine, in the great day of the Lord Jesus."]

DCCCLXXXIX.

ST. PAUL'S APPEAL TO THE ELDERS OF EPHESUS.

Acts xx. 17—21. *And from Miletus he sent to Ephesus, and called the Elders of the Church. And when they were come to him, he said unto them, Ye know, from the first day that I came into Asia, after what manner I have been with you at all seasons, serving the Lord with all humility of mind, and with many tears and temptations which befell me by the lying in wait of the Jews; and how I kept back nothing that was profitable unto you, but have shewed you, and have taught you publickly, and from house to house, testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.*

IT is to peculiar, and, if we may so speak, to accidental circumstances, that we are indebted for that full developement of St. Paul's character which we have in the holy Scriptures. He never willingly set about to commend himself; but he was sometimes

times compelled to vindicate himself against the accusations of his enemies, and to make known his own principles and conduct, in order to prevail on others to tread in his steps. It was with this latter view that he made his appeal to the Elders of Ephesus, when he was about to take a last farewell of them at Miletus.

Let us consider,

I. The appeal he made to them—

His stay among them had been of three years' continuance; so that during that time they had had abundant opportunities of knowing every thing respecting him. To them therefore he appealed respecting,

1. The exercises of his mind—

[He had "served the Lord with all *humility of mind*," conscious of his own utter insufficiency for so great a work as had been committed to him[a], and willing to make himself the servant of all, if by any means he might promote their eternal welfare[b]——— With this humility of mind he had blended *compassion for their souls;* so that whether he thought of those who rejected the Gospel, or those who walked unworthy of it, he had wept much on their account, both in his addresses to them, and in his supplications in their behalf[c]——— Moreover, he had *persevered in his efforts* for their good, notwithstanding such difficulties, as had often proved a severe trial to his faith and patience[d]———****]

2. The labours of his life—

[He had exerted himself for them with *fidelity* and *diligence:* in all his communications, consulting, not what might please, but what would "profit them:" and delivering to

[a] 2 Cor. ii. 16. [b] 2 Cor. iv. 5. & 1 Cor. ix. 19.
[c] Rom. ix. 2. Phil. iii. 18. 2 Cor. ii. 4.
[d] ver. 3. & Ch. xiii. 50, 51. xiv. 5, 6, 19, 20. & xvii. 5.

**** This subject should be differently enlarged upon, according to the occasion on which it should be delivered. If it were a *Visitation* or *Ordination* Sermon, the duties of the Ministry should be inculcated agreeably to this model: if it were a *Funeral* Sermon, the character of the deceased, as far as it accorded with this pattern, might be set forth: or, if it were a *Farewell* Sermon, a similar appeal might be made by the preacher, as far as it might be done with truth,

to them his sentiments, not merely in public addresses, but privately and personally in their own houses, whenever an occasion offered——— See **]

3. The subject of his ministrations—

[He had never entertained them with unprofitable speculations, but had uniformly endeavoured to instruct them in the two great fundamental doctrines of Christianity, "repentance towards God, and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ." These he inculcated on all, whether they were self-righteous Jews, or philosophizing and contemptuous Gentiles: he inculcated these things, I say, on all, as being equally necessary, and equally sufficient, for all the human race——— See **]

As the making of such an appeal to them may, to a superficial observer, appear to savour of pride, let us consider,

II. The end for which he made it—

We may be well assured that he sought not to advance his own glory: no; he had higher ends in view: he endeavoured to shew them,

1. How much they were indebted to God for the privileges they had enjoyed—

[To have such a Ministry of the word so long continued to them, was a greater blessing than to be loaded with all the temporal benefits that could have been bestowed upon them. By means of his Ministry, vast multitudes had been "turned from darkness unto light, and from the power of Satan unto God:" now therefore that they were about to be deprived of those blessings, it became them, not so much to grieve at the loss they were to sustain, as to adore God for the benefits they had enjoyed. In reviewing his labours amongst them for the space of three years, they would see how greatly they were indebted to God above other cities, which had enjoyed only a transient visit of a few days or weeks; and would feel themselves bound to render to the Lord, according to the benefits he had conferred upon them———]

2. How carefully they should guard against departing from the faith—

[Notwithstanding all the instructions they had received, they might, and would, if left to themselves, depart from God. St. Paul knew, that, "after his departure, grievous wolves would enter in among them;" and that "even from among

among themselves men would arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them." This, alas! is what frequently takes place at the removal of a faithful Minister, unless there be substituted in his place an Elisha, on whom the mantle of Elijah has fallen. When Moses was on the Mount only forty days, the people, even with Aaron at their head, departed from the Lord, and made a golden calf. What then must not be expected, where the bereavement is of long continuance, and the people are left without any such distinguished saint to superintend and controll them? ——— O let all of you take care, "lest any root of bitterness spring up and trouble you, and thereby many be defiled!———"]

3. How earnestly they should strive to promote the interests of the Church—

[These Elders were the same as in a subsequent verse are called "Overseers," or Bishops; and, as their peculiar duty called them "to feed the Church of God," he charged them to "take heed both to themselves and to all the flock over which the Holy Ghost had placed them," even that Church, which our incarnate "God had purchased with his own blood." What weighty considerations does he here urge, to stimulate them to a diligent discharge of their high office! O that every Minister felt their full influence, and were actuated by them in the whole of his conduct!

But we must not suppose that Ministers alone are interested in this charge: for every member of a Church may do much towards the establishment of his Brethren in faith, and love, and holiness. All should watch over one another for good; and this duty is still more imperative, when a faithful Pastor is removed, and scope is thereby afforded for the entrance of contentious persons to distract and divide the Church ———*]

* The course of discussion in this Sermon depending so entirely on the occasion on which it should be used, little more is afforded to the Reader, than an outline, to be filled up as the occasion may require.

DCCCXC.

WATCHFULNESS RECOMMENDED.

Acts xx. 31. *Therefore watch, and remember, that, by the space of three years, I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears.*

IT is, for the most part, a blessing to mankind that they

they cannot look into futurity: for, on the one hand, they would have their present enjoyments almost entirely destroyed by the prospect of future ills, while, on the other hand, a prospect of remote good would prove but a small alleviation of their present troubles. Nevertheless, from a wise foresight of probable and contingent events, the most incalculable benefits arise. St. Paul knew, by immediate revelation from God, that, after his departure, some would be found amongst the leading members of the Ephesian Church, who would labour to introduce divisions and dissensions among them: and the probability was, that, unless extraordinary watchfulness were maintained by the Elders of that Church, the restless sectaries would succeed in their efforts: he therefore, in the farewell discourse which he delivered to the Elders at Miletus, put them on their guard; and thus, by forewarning them of their danger, contributed in a very high degree to the preservation of that Church in peace and purity.

From the caution contained in the words before us, we observe,

I. That to warn men of their danger is the kindest office of love—

[Will any one doubt whether it was an act of love in St. Paul to *warn* the Ephesians—to warn them *individually* as well as collectively—to warn them "by night and by day," *as often as he could gain access to them*—to warn them *with* such *earnestness* as scarcely ever to address them without floods of "tears"—to do this *incessantly*—for *three years together*, when there was perhaps no other Church with whom he made so long an abode? However his fidelity might have been represented *there*, *we* have no doubt of the source from whence it sprang. Shall it be thought harsh then and unkind in *us* to warn our hearers? Who would impute it to harshness, if a parent warned his child, when walking on the brink of an unseen precipice, or playing on the hole of an asp, or cockatrice den? "We know the terrors of the Lord; and *therefore* we persuade men." We know, that the soul that dies in an unregenerate state can never be admitted into the kingdom of heaven[a]: we know, that no person can be saved, who does not truly believe in Christ, and rely upon him

[a] John iii. 3.

him *alone* for salvation[b]: we know, that "without holiness no man shall see the Lord." On these accounts we warn the unholy, the unbelieving, the unregenerate; and intreat them to flee from the wrath to come. If we appear earnest at any time, ought we to be blamed as too zealous, or needlessly severe? No: you have infinitely more reason to complain on account of our coldness and treachery, than on account of any excess in our fidelity and earnestness. What little zeal we do shew, should be esteemed the fruit of love. And, if we could follow you from the public ordinances to your respective houses, and there renew to you *separately*, and *with tears*, the warnings we have given you in public, we should perform to you the kindest office; and most approve ourselves the servants of Him, who wept over the murderous Jerusalem, and died for the salvation of a ruined world.]

To evince that such fidelity cannot under any circumstances be dispensed with, we observe,

II. That there are none so established, but they need to be put upon their guard—

[The persons warned by St. Paul, were not the low, the ignorant, the obscure, but the most distinguished persons in the Ephesian Church: they were the Elders, who superintended and governed the Church, and had doubtless been appointed to their high office because of their superior attainments in piety and virtue. Who then are they that can claim an exemption from Pastoral admonitions? Shall the rich? they perhaps, of all people in the world, most need to be put upon their guard, because their dangers are increased far beyond those of any other class[c]. Are those whose proficiency in knowledge or grace has raised them to eminence in the Church, exempt from danger? Look on David, or Solomon, or Peter, or Hymeneus and Philetus, or Demas, and then say whether any qualifications or attainments can place us beyond the reach of temptation; or whether there be a man in the universe to whom the exhortation in the text may not with great propriety be addressed? Be it known to you, that even St. Paul himself found it necessary to "keep under his body, and bring it into subjection, lest he should at last become a cast-away:" and therefore "what we say unto one we say unto all, Watch."]

It is of importance too to remember,

III. That the oftener we are warned, the more our responsibility is increased—

[The guilt contracted by the inhabitants of Bethsaïda and

[b] John iii. 18, 36. Phil. iii. 9. [c] Mark x. 25.

and Chorazin, far exceeded that of the idolatrous Tyrians or Sidonians, because they had disregarded the warnings given them by our blessed Lord: and the people of Capernaum, who had been exalted to heaven in their privileges, were cast down to hell for their abuse of them, and were doomed to a more awful condemnation than even Sodom or Gomorrah[d]. Our Lord told the Jews, that "if he had not come and spoken to them, they had not had sin (comparatively): but that, after the warnings he had given them, they had no cloke for their sin." Precisely to the same effect is St. Paul's admonition in the text: he reminds the Ephesians how long and earnestly he had warned them; and from thence insinuates, that, if they be unwatchful, their guilt will be proportionably increased. And is not this rule of judging universally admitted and approved? Is it not in this way that we estimate the criminality of our fellow-creatures? Do we not always consider, that, the more earnestly the necessity of obedience has been pressed upon them, the more aggravated is their disobedience or neglect? Surely then we should "remember how many years we have been warned;" and expect, that "to whom much has been committed, of them will God require the more."]

APPLICATION—

[Let *Believers* watch, "lest being led astray by the error of the wicked, or by their own deceitful lusts, they fall from their own stedfastness[e]" — — — Let *Backsliders* also watch, "lest being hardened through the deceitfulness of sin," they abandon themselves to wickedness or despair — — — Let *all* watch, lest, being blinded by the god of this world, they become slaves to his dominion, and partakers of his misery — — —]

[d] Matt. xi. 21—24. [e] 2 Pet. iii. 17.

DCCCXCI.

THE BLESSEDNESS OF LIBERALITY.

Acts xx. 35. *Remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive.*

SCARCELY any thing can be conceived more calculated to improve our minds, than the committing to memory such portions of Scripture as are peculiarly important. The Jews were accustomed to have select passages of their law fastened upon their garments, in order that they might be continually reminded of their duty. David, with less ostentation,

tion, and more piety, "hid God's word within his heart," as the means of preserving him from sin[a]: and he has recommended a similar practice to all young people, in order that their corrupt inclinations may be checked by the recollection of God's commands[b]. Among the various passages which claim peculiar attention, this which is before us has a very distinguished place. It should seem that our gracious Lord was in the habit of frequently inculcating the divine lesson in the text. And so generally was this saying known among his disciples, that the Evangelists did not judge it necessary to record it in any of their Gospels. Almost thirty years after his death, it was commonly mentioned in the Church, and was enforced by his Apostles as a principle of action, which was to be adopted by all his followers. St. Paul, having summoned the Elders of the Ephesian Church to meet him at Miletus, took his final leave of them, and gave them all the cautions and directions which he judged necessary. He entreated them more particularly to cultivate to the uttermost a spirit of benevolence; remembering the example which he himself had set them, and bearing in mind that saying of our Lord, of which he had so often reminded them, namely, that "it was more blessed to give than to receive." Happily for us, St. Luke was inspired to record in the history of St. Paul, what he, and all the other Evangelists, had omitted in their histories of Christ. And the very circumstance of its being so providentially preserved, may well render it an object of our most attentive regard.

Let us consider then,

I. The grounds of this declaration—

That the man who lessens his property by giving, should, by that very act, become more truly blessed than the most destitute person can be made by receiving, appears a paradox that cannot be explained. But to evince the truth of it, we shall point out some particulars,

[a] Ps. cxix. 11. [b] ib. ver. 8.

particulars, wherein the act of giving is manifestly more blessed than that of receiving—

1. It calls forth more noble feelings—

[The feelings of him who receives in a becoming manner, are by no means despicable. Gratitude is a very refined and dignified sensation; and, when ennobled by a view of God's hand, and an acknowledgment of his overruling providence in raising up to us a benefactor, it becomes one of the noblest exercises of the human mind. Yet we must confess, that the donor has the advantage of the receiver in these respects: for generosity and compassion are more elevated sentiments than gratitude, inasmuch as they have in them less of what is selfish, originating, not in any personal gratification, but solely in the wants and miseries of a fellow-creature. Moreover, if the donor be in a right spirit, he will act altogether with a view to God's glory: he will consider himself simply as God's agent or steward; and, instead of admiring himself on account of what he does for God, he will bless and magnify his God for employing him in so honourable a service. Would we form a just idea of the feelings of a good man discharging the duties of benevolence; let us paint to ourselves the sensations of the angel who was sent to strengthen our Saviour after his conflicts with all the powers of darkness[c]. Did *he* receive with joy the Father's mandate? did he fly on the wings of love to execute his divine commission? did he administer consolation to him with unutterable tenderness; and return with ardent gratitude to express his sense of the high honour conferred upon him? In him then we behold the true image of a saint, performing towards the afflicted the kind offices of love.]

2. It more assimilates us to the Deity—

[We do not at first sight behold any likeness to the Deity in him who receives an alms: yet, methinks, we may, without dishonouring our God, trace some resemblance: for Jehovah himself is receiving daily from his creatures a tribute of prayer and praise, which comes up before him as incense, and in the offering of which he considers himself as glorified. Moreover, our blessed Lord identifies himself with his distressed followers, and acknowledges himself as fed and clothed, when food and raiment are administered to them[d]: yea, in the days of his flesh, he condescended to subsist through the benevolence of others[e]. But in the donor there is a very striking likeness to the Deity, who is daily "opening his hand, and filling all things living with plenteousness." More particularly, if the donor be overlooking the trifling distinctions of

[c] Luke xxiii. 43. [d] Matt. xxv. 35, 36. [e] Luke viii. 3.

of neighbourhood or of party, and be extending his alms to all, whether friends or enemies, he approves himself in the highest degree conformable to the image of his God, who is "the comforter of all them that are cast down[f]," and who makes his sun to rise upon the evil and upon the good, and sends his rain upon the just, and upon the unjust[ff]."]

3. It is a source of more extensive benefits—

[He who receives an alms, benefits himself and those who depend upon him. The world around him too derive some good from his example, in that he teaches them a quiet submission to the will of God in circumstances of affliction and necessity. But the good which is done by the donor is almost incalculable. In the first place, he relieves the wants of *others*, who but for his timely aid, perhaps, must have languished, or even perished, for want. But the joys of penury relieved, form but a small portion of the benefits which a benevolent Christian imparts. He exceedingly improves *his own soul*, confirming in himself the most benevolent affections, and establishing habits which greatly conduce to his own happiness. Nor are the advantages which accrue to himself, confined to this world: for even in heaven will he have a recompence[g], and that too proportioned to the zeal with which he had cultivated the principle of love[gg]. Moreover, the benefits extend to *all around him*. Who can estimate the good which he does to the souls of others, while he adorns and recommends the Gospel of Christ? for, he not only makes himself an example to other professors of religion, and provokes them to emulation, but he removes the prejudices of the ungodly, and constrains them to confess the excellence of those principles which in their hearts they abhor[h]. With humble reverence we may say, that the benefit reaches even to *Christ himself*: for, as "in all the afflictions of his people he is afflicted[i]," so in all their consolations also he is comforted[k]: Further, if further we can go, even *God the Father also* is made a partaker of the benefit. For that which above all things he regards, is, his own glory: and our alms-deeds are often the occasion of most heartfelt praises and thanksgivings to him. *This* St. Paul specifies as one of the most blessed effects of liberality; an effect, in comparison of which, the relief of a fellow-creature is almost unworthy of notice[l].]

Having

[f] 2 Cor. vii. 6.
[g] Luke xiv. 14. & xvi. 9.
[h] Matt. v. 16.
[k] Matt. xxv. 40.
[ff] Matt. vi. 44, 45, 48.
[gg] 2 Cor. ix. 6.
[i] Isai. lxiii. 9.
[l] 2 Cor. ix. 12.

Having pointed out the grounds of this extraordinary declaration, we proceed to shew,

II. The improvement that should be made of it—

St. Paul, in exhorting the Ephesian Elders to "*remember* this saying of the Lord Jesus," designed to stimulate them to a suitable improvement of it. Now it will be found of use to us,

1. To form our principles—

[There is a benevolence which is extremely profitable to the world in a temporal view, while it is altogether unprofitable, and even ruinous, to their spiritual interests. When this principle is considered as *the whole* of religion, when it is made the foundation of a sinner's hope, and substituted in the place of Christ, it is then worthless, and odious, in the sight of God. But when it is cultivated from a regard to Christ, and exercised with a view to his glory, it is "an odour of a sweet smell, a sacrifice well-pleasing to God[m]." When viewed with all its attendant exercises of mind, it is the sum and substance of all practical religion[n]. Without this, all pretences to religion are vain: for if we do not love our brother, whom we have seen, it is impossible that we should love God, whom we have not seen[o]. As for wealth, we should consider it as of no value, any further than it enables us to exercise ourselves in offices of love. To amass wealth, or to spend it on ourselves, should afford us no pleasure, in comparison of devoting it to pious purposes: for, if it is more blessed to give it away, than to receive the most needful supplies, much more must the giving it away render us more blessed than either the spending or the saving of it can do. This is manifestly the scope of the divine aphorism in the text; and on this estimate of wealth our principles should be formed. It should be an established maxim with us, that to do good is to receive good, and to exercise love is to be truly blessed.]

2. To regulate our practice—

[Let the fore-mentioned principle be duly considered: and, when we are fully persuaded that to do good is the surest way to receive good, we shall gladly embrace every opportunity of benefiting others, and of getting good to ourselves.

Behold then, an opportunity now offers itself to every one of you! and, in the name of our adorable Lord, we entreat you both to *confer*, and to *receive*, blessedness.

First,

[m] Phil. iv. 18. [n] Gal. vi. 2. [o] 1 John iv. 20.

First, *confer* blessedness[p] —— Think that perhaps your present generosity may be overruled, not merely for the temporal relief of a distressed brother, but for the everlasting salvation of some immortal soul. O let this thought stimulate you to the most cheerful and beneficent exertions.

If any say, "I have nothing but what I earn by manual labour; and even that is little more than suffices for my own necessities;" I answer, This is the very case stated by St. Paul, who determines that such persons ought to give according to their ability[q]; and, in the very verse before the text, he tells us how he himself acted under those circumstances; and then he adds, "I have shewed you, that, *so* labouring, ye ought to support the weak[r]."

Next, *receive* blessedness. We have hitherto spoken on behalf of our indigent and afflicted Brethren. But we must change our voice: it is not for them, so much as for *you*, that we preach: yes, you who are opulent, you who have the means of doing good, you are the persons *to* whom we preach, and *for* whom we preach. Receive blessedness, I say, far greater blessedness than it is in your power to confer on others. Strengthen in yourselves the habits of benevolence. Imitate Him "who went about doing good;" Him, "who, though he was rich, yet for your sakes became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich[s]." Imitate the God and Father of the Universe, whose tender mercy is over all his works. Go, and put your money into his hands: for, "what you give to the poor, you lend unto the Lord; and he will pay it you again[t]." It is "fruit that will abound to your own account[u]." If you trust in your wealth, it will be a foundation of sand, a broken reed: but do good with it, and you will "lay up in store for yourselves a good foundation against the time to come[x]." Whether then ye covet present or future happiness, "remember the words of the Lord Jesus," and shew the love to others which he has shewn to you[y].]

[p] If this be *a Charity Sermon*, it will be proper in this place to shew the particular nature of the charity, and what blessings are likely to accrue from it.

[q] Eph. iv. 28. [r] ver. 34, 35. [s] 2 Cor. viii. 9.
[t] Prov. xix. 17. [u] Phil. iv. 14. [x] 1 Tim. vi. 18, 19.
[y] John xiii. 34.

DCCCXCII.

PAUL'S READINESS TO SUFFER FOR CHRIST'S SAKE.

Acts xxi. 13. *I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.*

INNUMERABLE

INNUMERABLE are the devices of our great adversary, to blind our eyes, and to keep us in a course of sin; and, when we have been enabled to burst the chains in which he once led us captive, he labours still to tempt and beguile us in every possible way, if so be he may prevail at last to turn us aside from God. None, whilst they continue in the flesh, are out of the reach of his assaults. Even our blessed Lord, when he condescended to assume our nature, "was in all things tempted as we are, though without sin." And such is the subtlety of Satan, that he will even instigate the best of men to become tempters to their brethren. He stirred up Peter to dissuade his Lord from submitting to those sufferings which he had covenanted to endure: and in like manner he moved the saints at Cesarea to dissuade Paul from going up to Jerusalem, whither he was proceeding for the furtherance of his Master's cause. There was at Cesarea a prophet named Agabus, who took Paul's girdle, and bound with it his own hands and feet, and then declared that the owner of that girdle should so be bound by the Jews at Jerusalem, and be delivered into the hands of the Romans. Immediately all the saints at that place besought Paul with tears to desist from his purpose, that by staying away from Jerusalem he might avoid the predicted evils. This advice, though well meant on their parts, proceeded in reality from Satan himself; who knew, that if he could intimidate the apostle Paul, he should gain a material advantage over the whole Church of God. But Paul was aware of Satan's device, and saw his agency, though under the semblance of an angel of light: and his answer to his weeping friends shews how every Christian should act, when tempted to turn from the path of duty; "What mean ye, to weep, and to break mine heart? for I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus."

From these words we shall take occasion to shew,

 I. That

I. That the Lord Jesus Christ is worthy of all that we can do or suffer for him—

Were Christians as well acquainted with their Lord as they ought to be, there would be no occasion to insist upon so obvious a truth. But that none may continue ignorant of it, we intreat you to consider,

1. Who he is—

[He is no other than God's co-equal, co-eternal Son; "God of God, light of light, very God of very God;" even "God over all, blessed for evermore." Every perfection of the Deity is his ———— He is "the brightness of his Father's glory, and the express image of his person."

Now we are told, that "for a good *man* some would even dare to die:" shall less regard then be shewn for him who is *God*, as well as man? If our admiration of a *creature's* excellence be such as to make us voluntarily surrender up our life for him, shall any thing be deemed too much to do or suffer for the *Creator*, in whom all excellence is combined, and from whom all excellence proceeds? Shall a *star* be so admired, and the *sun* itself not be glorious in our eyes?]

2. What he has done and suffered for us—

[From all eternity, before we or even the worlds were made, did he set his love upon us, and enter into a covenant with the Father to redeem us from the miseries, which he foresaw we should bring upon ourselves. In the fulness of time he took upon him our nature for this very end: yes, "though he was in the form of God, and thought it not robbery to be equal with God, he emptied himself of all his glory, and took upon him the form of a servant." During his whole stay upon earth he was a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; and, when the appointed hour was come, he surrendered himself into the hands of his enemies, and "became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross."

What shall we say to these things? Did he act thus towards us when *enemies*? and shall we account any thing too much to do or suffer for Him, who has shewn himself so great a *friend*?]

3. What he is yet doing for us—

[Day and night is he interceding for us, that the wrath of God, which we have merited, may be averted from us. Whence is it that such barren fig-trees as we are, are yet permitted to cumber the ground? If he had not so often pleaded, "Spare them, O my Father, yet another year!"

should

should we not have long since been cut down, and cast into the fire?

Behold how, notwithstanding all our obstinacy in sin, he is yet sending his word to instruct us, his Ministers to invite us; yea, more, his good Spirit also to strive with us, if by any means he may save our souls alive. Know ye, that every good purpose or desire that has ever existed in your bosoms, has been inspired by him, with a view to bring you home to the fold of God.

Above all, see what he is doing for his believing people; how he watches over them for good, supplies their every want, carries on his good work in their souls, and makes them more than conquerors over all their enemies!

Think of these things; and then say, Whether such love should not constrain you to live to him, and, if need be, to surrender up your life for him?]

Verily, if we feel no weight in such considerations as these, we can have no interest in Christ; for it is certain,

II. That the true Christian has learned duly to appreciate his worth—

We say not that every Christian has the attainments of the apostle Paul; but every one resembles him in this, that he entertains worthy thoughts of Christ,

1. In the convictions of his mind—

[Merely nominal Christians are content to compliment Christ with the name of Saviour: but the true Believer has a practical sense of his excellency: he views Christ as the one foundation of all his hopes: he sees that nothing but his atoning blood could ever have obtained reconciliation for him with his offended God——— Except as redeemed by the blood of Christ, the Believer has no more hope than the fallen angels: he is convinced that with them he must take his portion to all eternity, if he be not interested in that great Sacrifice which was made for the sins of the whole world.

As bought with the precious blood of Christ, the Believer sees that he is the Lord's property, and that to devote himself wholly to him is not only an acceptable, but a highly "reasonable, service." In the deliberate conviction of his mind "he thus judges, that if one died for all, then should all live, not unto themselves, but unto Him that died for them and rose again." And this we say is the *universal* sentiment of all true Christians: for the Apostle says, "None of us (of us Christians) liveth to himself, and *no man* dieth unto himself;

self; but whether we live, we live unto the Lord, and whether we die, we die unto the Lord; so that, whether living or dying, we are the Lord's."]

2. In the purposes of his heart—

[This is not a speculative sentiment in the Believer's mind, but a rooted principle, that operates in the whole of his behaviour. In his eyes, Christ "is exalted, and extolled, and is very high." No words can express how "precious He is to him." Hence he gladly gives himself up to Christ; and seeks to have, not his actions only, but his very "thoughts also, brought into captivity to the obedience of Christ." As for the opposition of an ungodly world, he cares not for it: whatever crosses lie in his way, he takes them up; and "rejoices that he is counted worthy to bear them" for his Redeemer's sake. If he be called to sacrifice friends, or interests, or liberty, or even life itself, he draws not back: he has counted the cost, and is ready to pay it; desirous only that "Christ may be magnified in his body, whether by life or death." Like Moses, he "esteems the reproach of Christ greater riches than all the treasures of Egypt;" and, like Paul, "counts all things but dung, that he may win Christ." In a word, he is "*ready*, not to be bound only, but also to die, at any time and in any manner, for his name's sake."]

ADDRESS,

1. Those whose views of Christ are imperfect—

[Doubtless there is no man that knows him fully, or can "search him out unto perfection." The Apostles themselves "knew him but in part," and "saw him only as through a glass, darkly:" but the generality of Christians behold "no form or comeliness in him" at all, or at least not such as to stir up in their hearts any ardent "desire after him." Now in our text we have a criterion whereby to judge of our views of Christ: do we find our hearts so knit to him with love and gratitude, as to render his "yoke easy to us, and his burthen light?" Is liberty or life itself of no account with us, if by the sacrifice of it we may glorify his name? Then indeed we may be said to know him; then have we that "knowledge of him which is life eternal." But, oh! how rare is this! Beloved Brethren, search and try your own hearts in relation to it; and if, as is to be feared of too many amongst us, you have never yet been transported with love to his name, beg of God to "reveal him in your hearts" by his Holy Spirit, and to "shine into your hearts, to give you the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ."]

2. Those

2. Those whose attachment to him is wavering—

[Many desire to follow Christ, but are afraid to bear his cross. But, Brethren, you must have a cross to bear. Though I am no prophet, like Agabus, yet I can tell you, by the Spirit of God, that "all who will live godly in Christ Jesus must suffer persecution." You may not be called to suffer imprisonment and death; but you must be prepared to welcome them, if they should be allotted to you for the sake of Christ. You must expect that your friends will dissuade you from exposing yourselves to the contempt of some, and the hostility of others: and, if your dangers should be great and imminent, they will even try to prevail upon you by their intreaties and tears. But beware how you listen to any advice which may divert you from the path of duty. Even good people will sometimes be crying, "Spare thyself," when they see you "abounding" with more than ordinary zeal "in the work of the Lord." But, whilst you *tenderly reprove their weakness* (as Paul did,) be firm and stedfast to your purpose: for "if once you put your hand to the plough, and then look back, you are not fit for the kingdom of God." "Be faithful unto death, and God will give you a crown of life."]

3. Those who are practically manifesting their zeal for his glory—

[Blessed be God, there are some who have already begun the employment of heaven, and are singing, "Unto Him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, be glory and dominion for ever and ever." And, as in heaven there are multitudes who "loved not their lives unto the death," so amongst us, I trust, there are some who would willingly die for the name of the Lord Jesus. Happy, happy they who feel this *readiness* of mind to do and suffer whatever they may be called to; for great is their reward in heaven. Go on, Beloved, stedfast in the faith, and never giving way to terror on account of any adversaries. Are you advised to shrink from trials! reply with Nehemiah, "Shall such a man as I flee?" But remember, that your sufficiency for this proceeds from God alone: if not upheld by him, you will, "as soon as tribulation and persecution arise because of the word," be turned aside, and make shipwreck of your faith. Live nigh to the Saviour then, and maintain sweet fellowship with him: then you will find his service a delight; and whatever sufferings you are called to endure for him, you will easily sustain. But, if once you decline from Christ in your heart, his commandments will become grievous to you, and every cross a burthen. The true way to meet even the most formidable death with joy, is to "die daily," and to be continually "looking for, and hasting unto the coming of the day of Christ."]

DCCCXCIII.

PAUL BECOMING A NAZARITE:

Acts xxi. 20—23. *And when they heard it, they glorified the Lord, and said unto him, Thou seest, brother, how many thousands of Jews there are which believe; and they are all zealous of the law. And they are informed of thee, that thou teachest all the Jews which are among the Gentiles, to forsake Moses, saying, That they ought not to circumcise their children, neither to walk after the customs. What is it therefore? The multitude must needs come together: for they will hear that thou art come. Do therefore this that we say unto thee.*

FEW subjects require so much caution in the preacher, or candour in the hearers, as that which we are now called to contemplate. To lay down general rules is easy; but to apply them to all states and circumstances is a matter of extreme difficulty: just as the drawing a rough outline of the human body may be done by a novice in the art of painting; but to fill up all the parts in the perfect order of nature, requires the hand of a master. Yet it is not uncommon for persons to sit in judgment on their fellow-creatures with as much confidence as if it was impossible for them to err. The conduct of the apostle Paul in the passage before us has been much condemned; and a Minister almost endangers his own character by undertaking to defend it. But I am persuaded it is defensible, and that he acted as became him in existing circumstances: and I cannot but think, that when the whole Church at Jerusalem united in recommending that conduct, and St. Paul adopted it on their recommendation, it is somewhat presumptuous in us, who are so incompetent to form a judgment in comparison of them, to stigmatize what by them was universally approved. Indeed, to suppose that he who but a few days before had withstood so manfully the solicitations of his friends to keep away from Jerusalem, and had declared himself ready to be bound or to die there, for the Lord's sake, should be left of God to betray the cause which he had

had undertaken to support, is to dishonour not the Apostle only, but that God whom he served.

That we may communicate our sentiments clearly, we shall endeavour,

I. To explain the Apostle's conduct—

There was a violent prejudice at Jerusalem against the apostle Paul—

[St. Paul having been sent chiefly to the Gentiles, had neglected the Jewish Ritual; whilst the Church at Jerusalem, consisting entirely of Jews, had still been observant of its forms. Nor is this difference to be wondered at: for even the Apostles themselves, for six years after the day of Pentecost, knew not that the Gentiles were to be incorporated with the Jews, and that the partition-wall between them was to be broken down. Hence they, and all their converts, adhered to the ceremonial law, and to many of "the customs," which they had "received by tradition from their fathers:" nor do they appear to have wholly laid them aside till the destruction of Jerusalem, and of the whole Jewish polity, rendered the continuance of them impracticable. Considering therefore the veneration in which the Mosaic institutions were held, it is not to be wondered at that the Jewish Christians should regard Paul as an *apostate* from Moses[a].

It was to counteract this idea, that an expedient was devised by James and the Jewish Elders. They knew that whilst this prejudice remained, the Christians at Jerusalem were not likely to reap any benefit from the Ministry of Paul; or rather, that great dissensions and divisions were likely to be occasioned by him: and therefore they wished to reconcile the minds of the people by some public act on the part of Paul. It happened that at that time there were four Jewish Christians who were performing vows of Nazariteship in the Temple; and it was proposed to Paul to join with them, and to submit to all the rites prescribed to Nazarites by the law; and thus to shew publickly, that, though he had neglected all Jewish ceremonies among the Gentiles, and had maintained that they were no longer binding on the Jews themselves, he did not think that the observance of them was criminal. James was particular in making known to Paul the precise ground on which he wished him to accede to the proposal. He reminded Paul, that he did not mean to interfere with the decree which had been made in reference to the Gentiles many years before, when Paul himself had come up to Jerusalem to inquire respecting the continuance of circumcision; but that he only wished to convince the Christians at Jerusalem that Paul was no enemy to Moses.

On

[a] ἀποστασίαν διδάσκεις.

On these grounds Paul, who not very long before had himself made a vow of Nazariteship at Cenchrea[b], adopted the plan proposed, and immediately proceeded to carry it into execution.

The particular duties of Nazarites, and the sacrifices they offered at the time of their purification, are stated in the 6th chapter of the Book of Numbers. The person who took upon him those vows was only bound so far as he had voluntarily bound himself: and hence Paul was at liberty to join the other Nazarites, and to complete with them what they alone had begun.]

Such was the precise state of the case, and such the conduct of the apostle Paul, which now we proceed,

II. To vindicate—

Various are the charges which have been inconsiderately brought against Paul for his conduct on this occasion; but if we view it candidly, we shall find that he was not really obnoxious to any one of them:

1. Insincerity—

[Great stress is laid on those words of James, "Do this," "that all may know that those things whereof they were informed concerning thee, are nothing, but that thou thyself also walkest orderly, and keepest the law[c]." But can we suppose that James exhorted him to declare a downright falsehood, which thousands of Jews there present were able to contradict? Would not such a proposal have excited in Paul the greatest abhorrence? We must understand the proposal as it was understood at the time. The Jewish Christians had been informed, that Paul set himself against Moses, and would in no case submit, or suffer any other Jew to submit, to any of his appointments. Now, says James, shew them that this is not true, by submitting to this particular appointment proposed to you. To this proposal Paul acceded. Was there any insincerity in that? No: it precisely accorded with his own views, and was the deliberate expression of his own mind ———]

2. Inconsistency—

[When Peter had, through fear of some Jewish Christians, been guilty of dissimulation, and had made such a compliance as that recorded in our text, Paul had publickly reproved him before the whole Church[d]: and now that Paul himself

[b] Acts xviii. 18. [c] ver. 24. [d] Gal. ii. 11—14.

himself was brought into similar circumstances, (it may be said) he acted in the very way that he had before condemned. But this is not a just statement of the case. Peter had acted in a very different manner, and from very different principles. He had not only gone back to Jewish ceremonies himself, but had compelled the Gentiles also to conform to them: and this he had done solely through the fear of man. But St. Paul compelled no one to follow his example: he abridged no man's liberty: he merely conformed to a rite himself, from love to his fellow-creatures, and from a hope of furthering their eternal welfare. The two cases were as different as can well be conceived. St. Paul did nothing but what he had frequently done on other occasions. He had himself circumcised Timothy, that Timothy might find the readier acceptance among the Jews: and St. Paul tells us, that he had always acted on the same principle, whenever a just occasion had arisen; "To the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might gain the Jews; to them that are under the law, as under the law, that I might gain them that are under the law[e]." Thus, instead of being guilty of any inconsistency, he acted on the very principles which he had invariably pursued.]

3. Unfaithfulness both to God and man—

[St. Paul had received a commission to go to the Gentiles; and to shew both to them, and to the Jews, that the law was abolished, and that both Jews and Gentiles were henceforth to form "one body in Christ:" and, it may be said, that in this act of his, he was "building again the things he had destroyed." But again, I say, we must distinguish between an occasional conformity to a rite for the sake of removing prejudices, and an insisting on that rite as necessary. If he had told the Jews that the ceremonial law was *necessary to be observed* in order to their salvation, he would indeed have betrayed the cause of Christ. If he had even inculcated the observance of it as *having an efficacy towards their acceptance with God*, he would also have betrayed the cause of Christ: because it is certain, that such an idea would have put the ceremonial law in the place of Christ, and would have made the cross of Christ of no effect[ee]. But he merely shewed, that if, on the one hand, men were not to be *saved by* their observance of the law, they would not be *condemned for* it, provided they did not rely upon it for their justification before God. The time for the total abolition of the ceremonial law was not yet fully come: it was gradually passing away; and, when Jerusalem should be destroyed, as it would soon be by the Romans, the whole Jewish law and polity would be swept away together. Till that period should arrive, the observance

[e] 1 Cor. ix. 20. [ee] Gal. v. 2—4.

vance of the law was purely optional; and whether men observed it or not, they should equally be accepted, provided they acted really with a view to please and honour God[f]. This was the whole that St. Paul's conduct was intended to prove; and his proving it in the way he did, was highly acceptable to God, and profitable to the Church.]

Having shewn the propriety of his conduct, we now proceed,

III. To improve it—

Many valuable lessons we may learn from it; a few of which we will now suggest to you:

1. Endeavour truly and simply to approve yourselves to God—

[God forbid that any thing which has been spoken should be considered as justifying dissimulation, or as countenancing a worldly temporizing spirit: no; we must act uprightly, as in the presence of the heart-searching God. We must so act, as to have "the testimony of our conscience, that with simplicity and godly sincerity, *not with fleshly wisdom*, but by the grace of God, we have our conversation in the world." The Christian should, so to speak, be a transparent character; and should prevent, as far as possible, "his good from being evil spoken of." In acting according to circumstances, he must take care not to be influenced by unhallowed principles, or to carry his concessions to too great an extent. It will sometimes happen, that the path of duty is extremely difficult to find, and that even good men may differ in their judgment respecting it: but in such cases it will be well, after consulting the most aged and experienced of the Lord's people, to commit the matter to the Lord, and to do that which we judge will be most acceptable in his sight: and, if we have the testimony of our consciences, that we are willing to be bound or die for him, we need not fear but that God will guide us aright, or, at least, so guide us, that we shall not greatly err.]

2. As far as you can consistently with a good conscience, consult in your conduct the welfare of those around you—

[That inconsiderate conduct which has no regard to the feelings of others is common indeed, but highly culpable. We may, by imprudence, cast a stumbling-block before others, when, by a more wise and temperate conduct, we might remove it out of their way. In all such cases, however we may think to please God by our zeal, we grievously offend him

[f] Rom. xiv. 2, 3, 6.

him by our want of love. Happy would it be if this matter were better understood by young people of every description. Many thousands of persons might be won by conciliatory conduct, who are repelled and disgusted by the injudicious sallies of intemperate zeal. Children, servants, yea, all of you who are under authority, remember, that, if you have souls, so have your parents, and masters, and Governors, souls also: and though you are not to concede one Christian principle for any man, or to act in any thing contrary to a known duty, yet you ought, to a certain degree, to "become all things to all men," and to "seek, not your own profit, but the profit of many, that *they* may be saved."]

3. Guard against rash and uncharitable judging—

[If the conduct of Paul, when acting by the advice of James and of all the Elders at Jerusalem, has been misunderstood, the conduct of holy men at this time may be misunderstood also; and we may be condemning them for things which God most highly approves. It is impossible for us to judge aright, unless we put ourselves into the precise situation of those whose conduct we are contemplating: nay, more, we should also know the exact motives by which they were actuated. But these things are known perfectly to God alone; to whom alone the office of judging belongs. "Who art thou that judgest another? To his own Master he standeth or falleth." If you do not see the exact propriety of a brother's conduct, apply to him for an explanation of it, if you will; but judge him not. Are you weak? judge not the strong: are you strong? despise not the weak: but all of you determine this rather, to "take up every stumbling-block out of our brother's way," and "seek those things whereby one may edify another[g]."]

[g] Rom. xiv. 13, 19.

DCCCXCIV.

PAUL'S VINDICATION OF HIMSELF BEFORE FELIX.

Acts xxiv. 14, 15. *But this I confess unto thee, that after the way which they call heresy, so worship I the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the Law and the Prophets; and have hope toward God, which they themselves also allow, that there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust.*

IN the chapter before us we have a striking instance of the confidence inspired by the consciousness

ness of truth. St. Paul had been seized under the mistaken idea that he had introduced a Heathen into the Temple, and profaned the Temple. Had there been no other ground of animosity against him, it is probable that he would soon have convinced his adversaries of their mistake; but he was the great Apostle of the Gentiles, and therefore very obnoxious to the whole Jewish nation. Hence a prejudice existed against him, as hostile to the Temple and the Law: and the moment a cry was raised against him, though on quite a mistaken ground, it excited an universal tumult. From the enraged populace he was rescued by the Roman soldiers: and an opportunity was thus afforded him of vindicating himself before the Roman Governor at Cesarea. Ananias, the high-priest, with the Elders of the Jewish people, went down, with a famous orator named Tertullus, to accuse him. Tertullus, anxious only to obtain judgment against him, omitted nothing whereby he might gain his cause. He complimented Felix on the equity and acceptableness of his government; when it was universally complained of as most iniquitous: and he charged Paul with the profanation of the Temple, of which he had not been in the least guilty; and with exciting the tumult, which the Jews themselves had raised. But, in the midst of all, Paul stood like a rock, unmoved by the waves that dash upon it. When permitted to speak, he followed his accuser through the various articles of the charge. In his introduction, he shewed the difference between the artful compliments of a courtier, and the respectful address of a Christian: and, in the remainder of his short apology, he refuted every accusation that was brought against him. There was one part indeed of the charge, which, in a less obnoxious form, he acknowledged. He was accused of being "a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes:" "*This*," says he, "I confess unto thee, that after the way which they call heresy, so worship I the God of my fathers."

Now

Now from this acknowledgment of his we shall take occasion to shew,

I. In what way the Christian serves his God—

We have not here to consider the Christian's experience at large; but simply to advert to his *faith* and *hope*—

[The Christian "*believes* all things that are written in the Law and the Prophets." Whatever God has told him, whether it accord with his pre-conceived notions or not; yea, whether he can comprehend it, or not; he does not presume to gainsay it, but receives it upon the authority of God ——— But the things to which the Apostle more especially alluded in the text, were those which relate to Christ and his Gospel[a]; such as the prophecies which predicted his advent, the representations which shadowed forth his work and offices; and the promises made to his obedient followers; all of which are embraced by the Christian with faith unfeigned.

This is the foundation on which the Christian builds his *hope*. He expects assuredly, that "there shall be a resurrection both of the just and unjust," when "every one shall receive according to that he hath done, whether it be good or evil." To the ungodly this period is an object of fear and terror; but to the Christian, of joyful hope. He "knows in Whom he has believed; and is persuaded, that what He hath promised, he is able also to perform:" to that day therefore he looks forward, as the completion of all his wishes, and the consummation of all his joys ———]

In all this there appears to be nothing very remarkable. But before we affirm that, let us consider,

II. In what light this service of his is often viewed—

[Where these sentiments are held in a merely speculative manner, they give no offence: they are even approved as orthodox: but where they are practically maintained and enforced, they are vilified as "heresy," and loaded with every opprobrious name. It is in vain that we appeal "to the Law and the Prophets;" it is in vain that we shew to men that these are the things "which they themselves allow;" in vain we refer them to the Articles and Homilies, which contain the acknowledged sentiments of our Church; or to the prayers which every member of our Church offers up to God: nothing can convince men that we are not heretics or fanatics. Practical Christians are still "a sect everywhere spoken against[aa]."

Now

[a] Acts xxvi. 22, 23. [aa] Acts xxviii. 22.

Now what is the reason of this? Whence is it that the same truths which are approved in theory, should be disapproved when reduced to practice? The reason is, that whilst held in theory only, they leave us in full possession of all our evil habits and propensities; but when applied to practice, they produce a course of life directly opposite to the desires of the flesh, and the customs of the world. Suppose, for instance, a man's *faith* be such as enables him to realize all that the Scriptures have spoken; to tremble at every threatening, and to expect the accomplishment of every promise; suppose it lead him to "live entirely by faith on the Son of God" as "all his salvation and all his desire;" What a difference will this of necessity put between him and others! Suppose his *hope* also be such as disposes him to live in daily preparation for his last account, and in a blessed anticipation of the glory that awaits him; Will not this make him appear strange and singular? and will not those who feel condemned by his heavenly life, reflect on him, rather than on themselves? Doubtless they will: they did so in the days of Christ and his Apostles; who neither said, nor did, more than the Scriptures required: but the people hated the light, and would not come to the light, lest their deeds should be reproved; and agreed to brand that as heresy, which they could not prevail upon themselves to embrace and practise. And thus it will be to the end of time: men will let you think as you please, if only you will conform to their habits: but if you will take the Scriptures as the only rule of your faith and practice, you shall be hated and reviled for it as long as there is an ungodly man upon earth: "He that is born after the flesh, will, and cannot but hate and persecute him that is born after the Spirit:" "The servant cannot be above his Lord."]

What then is to be done? Are we to lay aside this service? if not, let us inquire,

III. In what manner it is to be maintained—

This whole apology affords us a very bright example. We are not to sacrifice truth and virtue to a senseless or malignant clamour; but to maintain our principles,

1. With firmness of mind—

[We are to "prove all things; and then to hold fast that which is good[b]." We cannot be too careful in examining every principle which is inculcated as of Divine authority. We should never give our assent to any doctrine whatever

[b] 1 Thess. v. 21.

ever upon the testimony of man; but should search the Scriptures for ourselves, to see whether the things we hear be agreeable to them or not. But, when once we are satisfied that any thing is really from God, then we must "hold it fast." We must "not be tossed to and fro, like children, with every wind of doctrine;" nor, on the other hand, must we be deterred from confessing Christ through the fear of man: but we must "hold fast that which we have received, that no man may take our crown[c]:" we must "hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering[d]." St. Paul had enough to intimidate him, if there were any legitimate reason for yielding to the impressions of fear on such occasions: but "nothing could move him: not even life itself was of any value in his sight," when standing in competition with fidelity to his Lord. It was his attachment to Christ that was the real ground of the persecution he now met with; yet he would not deny his Lord; but confessed himself "an heretic," according to *their* acceptation of the term. Thus should we be stedfast in the faith; and be willing even to lay down our lives in its defence.]

2. With tenderness of spirit—

[There is a contemptuous way of speaking of the world, in which some professors of religion indulge themselves, which is extremely reprehensible. It is true indeed that the world are both blind and carnal; but we ought to look well to our own spirit when we take upon ourselves to call them so: for, "who is it that has made us to differ? or what have we that we have not received?" When we think of their blindness and carnality, it should not be in the proud spirit of a Pharisee, "Stand off, I am holier than thou," but with tears, even with floods of tears, on account of their unhappy condition[e]. We should call to mind our own former blindness, (as Paul does[f],) for the humiliation of our own souls, and as an encouragement to seek their welfare. And "we should be ready always to give a reason of the hope that is in us with meekness and fear[g];" "in meekness instructing them, if God peradventure may give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth[h]"———]

3. With purity of heart—

[This the Apostle particularly specified as the associate of his faith and hope[i]. To profess a regard for Christian principles whilst we are regardless of Christian practice, is only to deceive our own souls. Faith and a good conscience are

[c] Rev. iii. 11. [d] Heb. x. 23.
[e] Luke xix. 41. Ps. cxix. 136. Jer. xiii. 17. [f] ver. 9—11.
[g] 1 Pet. iii. 15. [h] 2 Tim. ii. 22—24. [i] ver. 26.

are the two pillars on which the fabric of our religion stands: and if either of them give way, the other falls of course[k]. The world will try our principles by this touch-stone: they will say, "What do ye more than others." And truly, when we profess so much higher principles than they, they have a right to expect in us a purer life. Not that they would be justified in rejecting the Gospel, even if every professor of it were to become a Judas: but such is their perverseness, that they will harden themselves more against religion on account of one Judas, than they will esteem it for the piety of a dozen other Apostles. This however is only an additional reason for watchfulness on our part. Whatever may be the conduct of the world, "our duty is to shew them our faith by our works." In this way we may hope at least to do some good: we shall "by well-doing put to silence the ignorance of foolish men," and "make *them* ashamed who falsely accuse our good conversation in Christ." We may hope too that in some instances we may accomplish more; and "win by our good conversation those who never would listen to the written word." At all events, it is in this way that we must approve ourselves to God, and stand with confidence before him in the day that he shall judge the world.]

[k] 1 Tim. iii. 9. & i. 19.

DCCCXCV.

PAUL'S COMMISSION.

Acts xxvi. 17, 18. *Unto whom now I send thee, to open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified, by faith that is in me.*

NEVER was there a more glorious triumph of Divine grace than in the conversion of St. Paul. How active and inveterate an enemy he was to Christ, previous to his conversion, is well known ——— Had he only been arrested in his career, and humbled, it would have been a signal victory: but to change the whole current of his affections, and to turn against Satan those weapons, which, through the instrumentality of this fiery bigot, he had been using to destroy the Church, this was indeed to "beat the sword into a plough-share, and the spear into

into a pruning-hook, and to display, in the brightest colours, the power and grace of Christ. We do not wonder, that when the Christians, whom he had so cruelly persecuted, heard of "his preaching the faith which he had just before laboured to destroy," "they glorified God in him."

The call of this man to the Apostleship, and the particular commission given him, are the points contained in our text. But as St. Paul's Ministry differs from ours only in the extent of his commission, and not in the subject of his ministrations, we shall wave any particular notice of him, and state to you the *immediate*, and *ultimate*, objects of *our* labours.

I. The immediate object of our labours—

That there is some considerable difference between the Gentiles and ourselves, we willingly concede. The darkness among them was more entire, their superstitions more absurd, their impieties more gross. But when we have made all due allowance on these heads, we must still say, that the points of resemblance between us are general, while the points of difference are only few and particular.

What, we would ask, is our state with respect to *knowledge* and *practice?*

[From education, we have obtained some general notions of Christianity. But what views have we of the extreme depravity of our nature, and the total alienation of our hearts from God? What insight have we into the way of salvation, as honouring all the perfections of the Deity, and as rendering Christ the hope, the joy, the glory of the universe? Is the beauty of holiness, or the nature and excellence of the spiritual life, clearly discerned amongst us? Are the devices of Satan known? and are we so exercised in the use of the Christian armour, as to be able to "fight a good fight," and "war a good warfare?"

Is not our practice too as defective as our knowledge? Satan is "the God of this world," "the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience." And by what do we discover his agency? is it not by the wickedness to which he instigates the world? See then, whether he do not exercise his power over *us*. Do not envy, wrath, malice, revenge, too often dwell in our hearts? Are not pride, ambition, covetousness, and earthly-mindedness, the principles which

actuate us in almost all our pursuits? Do we not harbour in our bosom sensuality, uncleanness, lasciviousness, and a whole host of evil passions! What greater proof can we have, that we are yet "in the snare of the devil, and led captive by him at his will?"]

To rectify the state of our hearers with respect to these things, is the immediate object of our labours—

[We wish "to open the eyes of men, and to turn them from darkness unto light." It is with this view that we set forth the "unparalleled deceitfulness, and desperate wickedness of the heart:" it is with this view that we exhibit Christ in all his fulness, suitableness, and sufficiency: in short, it is with this view that we study, and labour, and pray: and it is the hope of being useful in enlightening your minds, that makes our crosses easy, and our burthens light.

We know, that if light once come into your minds, we may hope to see you cast off the yoke of Satan, and become "the freemen of the Lord." While you continue in darkness, we are aware that you must of necessity remain under the power of the evil one: but when you have learned what provision is made for you in the Gospel, and how effectual the operations of the Holy Spirit shall be for your restoration to God, we anticipate the result, and rejoice in the prospect of your perfect emancipation. This is the end we desire to accomplish; even that you may be brought to surrender up yourselves unreservedly to God, and live as entirely under his influence, as you have hitherto lived under the influence of Satan.]

But these objects, important as they are, are only means to a further end, which we call,

II. The ultimate object of our labours—

It were a small matter to rectify your sentiments, or to change your conduct, if we did not succeed also in our ulterior objects; namely,

1. The bringing you into a state of acceptance with God—

[What would any change avail you, if you were under the guilt of unpardoned sin? That you all need forgiveness, you yourselves will not deny. And that the attainment of it is the most desirable of all objects, is a truth, which, in seasons of reflection, you cannot but feel. In a dying hour especially, if your minds are at all suitably impressed, you would account it of more value than the whole world. This then, beloved Brethren, is what we desire to bring you to. It is painful, inexpressibly painful to us, to see you perishing in the

the midst of mercy. We long for your salvation: we would account the salvation of a soul as the richest recompence we can possibly receive: and on this account we endeavour to take you by the hand, and to lead you to Christ. We assure you in God's name, that "the blood of Christ will cleanse you from all sin;" and that "all who believe shall be justified from all things." And then do we feel most truly happy, when we see you enjoying peace with God, and walking with him as your reconciled God and Father.]

2. The bringing you to the final and everlasting possession of his glory—

[Our object is not fully attained, till you are placed beyond the reach of harm, in the complete possession of happiness and glory. Could we but prevail with you, we would leave not so much as one of you in a perishing or doubtful state: we would "take all of you from the dunghill, and set you among the princes," "the saints in light." Those who have been set apart in the Divine counsels, and renewed after the Divine image, are already "begotten to an incorruptible inheritance:" even now are they "heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ." But at present they are only minors, who have the title indeed, but not the full possession of their estates. We long to help you forward to the latest hour of your lives, and, if you die before us, to see you, like a ship sailing into its destined port, enjoying "an abundant entrance into the kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ." Then Christ himself "sees of the travail of his soul, and is satisfied;" and then we also bless our God, that "we have not laboured in vain, or run in vain."]

In improving this subject, we would commend to your attention the following REFLECTIONS:

1. How injurious to the world is prejudice!

[There is a sad prejudice prevailing in the world against the truth itself, and against all who faithfully dispense it. The Gospel is often represented as calculated only to make persons melancholy, if not to drive them mad: and the worst motives that may be conceived, are imputed to us for preaching it. The consequence of this is, that many are kept away from attending the ministration of the word; and many, when they do hear it, shut their ears, and fortify their hearts, against the admission of it. But look into the text, and see what our objects are: is there any thing so formidable in these, that the succeeding in them should be called "a turning of the world upside down?" See the effects of the Gospel elsewhere described: "The wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad; and the desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose;"

rose:" "Instead of the brier shall grow up the fir-tree, and instead of the thorn shall grow up the myrtle-tree:" "Then shall the lame man leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing; for in the wilderness shall waters break out, and streams in the desert." Are these such changes as are to be deprecated, or that those who are instrumental to them should be regarded as "the filth of the world and the off-scouring of all things?" Search the Scriptures, Brethren, and judge for yourselves: or, if ye will form your judgment from the calumnies of a blind ungodly world, then know, that these very calumnies are so many testimonies to the truth of what we preach; and that in proportion as our Ministry is reviled after the manner of Christ's and his Apostles', the presumption is in our favour, that it does indeed resemble theirs'.]

2. How highly should the ordinances be prized!

[Conversion, from the first motions of good desire, to the entire formation of the Divine image on the soul, is of the Spirit of God. But the Holy Spirit works by means, and principally by the Ministry of his servants in the public ordinances. When therefore we go up to the House of God, we should go thither with a full expectation of meeting our God there, and with an ardent desire to experience his powerful operations on our souls. There, if we really desire it, our eyes shall be opened, our clouds of darkness dispelled, our chains broken, our iniquities pardoned, and the whole work of salvation perfected within us. Should we then grudge the time that will be occupied in waiting upon God? Should we prefer business, or pleasure, or any worthless indulgences, on the Sabbath, to a devout attendance on the House of Prayer? Or should we fear a little banter and ridicule, or the loss of any temporal interest, which may be incurred by shewing an attachment to the Gospel of Christ? If we could have access to any that are now before the throne of God, and could ask them, What they thought of the ordinances? Would they shew towards them the indifference that we do? Would the three thousand who were converted on the day of Pentecost, express regret, that ever they heard that sermon of Peter's, and "continued stedfastly in the Apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers?" Learn then now to think of the ordinances as you will think of them hereafter; improve them, whether on the Sabbath-day, or week-day, as you will hereafter wish that you had improved them; and beg of God in private, before ever you go up to his public ordinances, that you may draw water with joy out of those wells of salvation."]

3. How efficacious a principle is faith!

[The concluding words of our text are generally considered

dered as connected only with the word that immediately precedes them: and certainly, in this sense, they declare a most important truth, namely, that we are "*sanctified* by faith in Christ." But we apprehend, that a comma should follow the word "sanctified;" and that the last words of the text should be connected with both the clauses that precede it[a]. Faith is in reality that principle, by which, and by which alone, we obtain all spiritual blessings. Certainly it is that by which we receive the "forgiveness of our sins[b]:" for nothing but faith will unite us to Christ, or interest us in his meritorious death and passion. It is by faith also that we must be "sanctified[c];" for we cannot be renewed but by the Holy Spirit; nor can we receive the Spirit but from, and through, the Lord Jesus Christ, in the exercise of faith. Finally, it is by faith that we must obtain "that inheritance, which God has prepared for them that love him." We must "live by faith," and "stand by faith," and "walk by faith," and be "saved by faith," from first to last. The very text informs us, that by faith we are justified, and sanctified, and glorified. Let us then beg of God to infuse this Divine principle into our hearts. Let us study the character of Christ more and more; in order that we may know his excellency, and "receive continually out of his fulness;" and that "God may make him unto us Wisdom, and Righteousness, and Sanctification, and Redemption."]

[a] Thus—"That ye, by the faith that is in Christ, may receive, &c."
[b] Rom. v. 1. [c] Acts xv. 9.

DCCCXCVI.

PAUL'S VINDICATION OF HIS OWN MINISTRY.

Acts xxvi. 24, 25. *And as he thus spake for himself, Festus said with a loud voice, Paul, thou art beside thyself; much learning doth make thee mad. But he said, I am not mad, most noble Festus; but speak forth the words of truth and soberness.*

AMONGST the duties of a Judge, there is not any one of greater importance than that of giving a patient and candid attention to a prisoner's vindication of himself. But this is not always to be found, when religion forms the ground of accusation against a man. Prejudice and passion are too easily called into action on those occasions, and too often usurp the place of reason and reflection. St. Paul had very abundant cause to complain of this. He made

made many apologies before Judges and Governors, but could scarcely ever obtain a patient hearing. In the passage before us, he was standing before Festus and Agrippa; but long before he had completed his statement, he was interrupted by Festus, who cried with a loud voice, "Paul, thou art beside thyself: much learning doth make thee mad."

It will be profitable to notice,

I. What was the subject of Paul's Ministry—

This he himself had briefly, but comprehensively, stated[a]—

[He preached Christ as a dying and risen Saviour ——— and declared to all, "Jews and Gentiles," "small and great," that if they would believe on Jesus, HE would bring them into the full knowledge of the truth, and fill their souls with unutterable peace and joy ——— Nor did he introduce these doctrines as new; for they were none other than "Moses and the Prophets" had declared before; Moses, in the types and shadows of the ceremonial law[b]; and the Prophets, in plain and express predictions[c] ———]

And this is the one subject of our Ministry also—

[We set before you, from time to time, the great work of Redemption, through the sacrifice of the Son of God: and declare to you, that there is no other atonement, no other means of reconciliation, with an offended God. We direct your eyes to Christ also as risen from the dead to a new and endless life; and as not only making intercession for you, but possessing in himself all fulness of spiritual blessings, that you may receive from him whatsoever you stand in need of ——— We declare also, that no tongue can express, no imagination conceive, what "light," and peace, and joy, shall flow into your souls, if only you will believe on him, and give yourselves up unreservedly to him.

In these things we are sometimes supposed to bring new things to your ears; but we speak "nothing but what Moses and the Prophets most explicitly foretold."]

Unexceptionable as this was, we shall be grieved to see,

II. In what light it was viewed by his enemies—

Festus considered Paul's testimony as an indication of mental derangement—

[Festus,

[a] ver. 22, 23. [b] Lev. xiv. 4—7. & xvi. 8—10.
[c] Isai. liii.

[Festus, seeing that Paul was a man of erudition, concluded, that he had lost his senses by an over-attention to study; and that, consequently, all further attention to him would only be an unprofitable waste of time. Hence he said aloud, "Paul, thou art beside thyself: much learning doth make thee mad."]

And it is scarcely a more favourable judgment that is sometimes formed of us—

[Persons are very ready to pronounce, that those who preach and profess the Gospel, are mad. But whence arises such a judgment as this? Is there any thing in the Gospel itself that affords ground for it? or do the foregoing sentiments deserve so severe a censure? True it is, that the Prophets were uniformly reviled for the declarations they made: but one would have hoped, that the accomplishment of their prophecies should have secured for us a more equitable judgment: this however is not to be expected: as long as there remains a carnal mind in existence, so long must it be "enmity against God[d];" and whilst there is a natural man unconverted to God, so long will there be one to whom the things of the Spirit are foolishness[e]. We have only the fate of the Prophets of old, who in their day were accounted mad also[f]: and, if judged as they were, we must say with Paul, "If we be beside ourselves, it is to God[g]."

But whence arises this? It arises, first, from their want of candour: they will not give us an attentive hearing; but will run away with any detached expressions, put on them a construction that they were never designed to bear, and draw conclusions from them that we should utterly disavow; and then impute to *us* all the folly which they themselves have invented———

Another source of this harsh judgment is, their ignorance of the Scriptures. They will not study the Scriptures for themselves, nor take the trouble to compare our sentiments with the Sacred Records. What wonder then if they say, We are beside ourselves, when they will not listen even to the voice of God himself?———

The hope of vindicating themselves is a further source of the censures they cast on us: for, if they allow us to be right, they must of necessity condemn themselves; but, if they can persuade themselves that we are mad, then they may be considered as wise, and may rest satisfied with their own ungodly ways———

These, together with the rooted enmity of the carnal mind against God, are some of the chief sources of that uncharitable

[d] Rom. viii. 7.
[e] 1 Cor. i. 18. & ii. 14.
[f] 2 Kin. ix. 11. Jer. xxix. 26.
[g] 2 Cor. v. 13.

table judgment, which is passed at this day, no less than in the Apostolic age, on the preachers and professors of the Gospel of Christ.]

If the Gospel deserves not such treatment, let us inquire,

III. In what light it ought to be considered—

We cannot but admire the calm and respectful, yet firm and manly, answer which St. Paul returns to the insulting language of his Judge.

He maintained that he spoke only "the words of truth and soberness"—

[He was not afraid of his assertions being brought to any test: he knew that they were the very truth of God, and that unbiassed reason must approve of all that he had taught.]

And, as far as our doctrine agrees with his, we also are ready to make our appeal both to reason and Scripture—

[Let our words be tried, and see whether they be not words of truth and soberness. Refer to Moses and the Prophets, and see whether they do not set forth Christ as the "All in all" in the salvation of man. See whether they do not characterize a life of faith on the Son of God, as the true, the sure, the only source of happiness, both in this world and the next. They uniformly declare, that, if we "awake from our sleep, and arise from the dead, Christ will give us *light*[gg]"———

Reason also is no less on our side than Revelation. If there be a God, should we not serve him? If he have provided a Saviour for us, should we not seek an interest in him? If that Saviour be empowered to save to the uttermost all that come unto God by him, should we not cleave to him with full purpose of heart? Men may call this madness, if they will; but they are the dictates of sound reason: and to contradict them is as irrational as it is impious and profane ———]

IMPROVEMENT—

1. Be not alarmed at the aspersions cast upon religion—

[Ungodly men will revile religion, and endeavour to deter others from embracing it, by calling it "madness." But the truth is, that they themselves are mad. Try *them* by the standard of reason and revelation, and see whether they can

[gg] Eph. v. 14. These words, though quoted by St. Paul, are not contained in any particular passage of the Old Testament; but they are the substance of the whole.

can stand the test?——No: they are beside themselves; "madness is in their hearts while they live:" "a deceitful heart hath turned them aside, so that they cannot deliver their souls, or say, Have I not a lie in my right hand?" If then they cry out against religion, know whence their clamour proceeds. The Jews said of Christ himself, "He hath a devil, and is mad: Why hear ye him?" Wonder not therefore if similar advice be given in reference to his faithful servants, and similar reasons be assigned for it: and if the service of God must be accounted madness, then take up your cross boldly, and say with David, "I will yet be more vile for the Lord."]

2. Be careful to give no just occasion for them—

[There certainly is such a thing as enthusiasm, and under the influence of it many are led to act so as to excite strong prejudices against religion. But these have much to answer for before God. Religion, in its most exalted state, is "a reasonable," and I may add also, a rational, "service:" "The fear of the Lord that is wisdom, and to depart from evil is understanding." Endeavour then to shew, that "God hath given you, not a spirit of fear, but of love, and of power, and of *a sound mind*[h]." Endeavour to "walk in wisdom toward them that are without," yea, and to "walk wisely also before God in a perfect way." Ever remember, that "*truth and soberness*" must go together, and the justness of your sentiments must always be marked in the blamelessness of your conduct. The first thing certainly is to embrace the truth with the simplicity of a little child, not exalting some favourite doctrines, and overlooking others, but giving to every doctrine precisely that degree of importance which it appears to bear in the Holy Scriptures[i]——The next thing is, to carry your principles into effect, by regulating the whole of your conversation according to them, and fulfilling the duties of your own particular situation, whatever it may be, with care and diligence——This will "cut off occasion from them that seek occasion against you;" nor is there any better way of "putting to silence the ignorance of foolish men, than by well-doing."]

[h] 2 Tim. i. 7.

[i] Some are always dwelling on predestination and election, others on faith, and others on good works: some on the sufferings of Christ, others on the light within. To give every truth its due weight and proper place, should be the endeavour of a wise and sober-minded Christian.

DCCCXCVII.

THE ALMOST AND THE REAL CHRISTIAN COMPARED.

Acts xxvi. 28, 29. *Then Agrippa said unto Paul, Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian. And Paul said, I would to God that not only thou, but also all that hear me this day, were both almost, and altogether such as I am, except these bonds.*

IT is surprising to see what different effects the Gospel produces upon different minds; some view it as the very extreme of folly, whilst others regard it as the most glorious display of Divine wisdom. Even when our blessed Lord himself spake, some of his audience believed his words; whilst others said, "He hath a devil and is mad." Thus differently were some of Paul's auditors affected also, when he vindicated himself before Festus and Agrippa: Festus exclaimed, "Paul, thou art beside thyself;" whilst Agrippa, falling under the force of truth, said, "Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian."

The effects however which the Gospel produces on all who receive it aright, is uniform: and St. Paul's answer to Agrippa affords us a fit occasion to set them before you in the clearest manner. It leads us to notice,

I. In what state Agrippa was—

He was *convinced in his judgment*, but *undecided in his will*—

[He was conversant with all the Jewish laws and customs[a], and a firm believer in the Prophetic Writings[b]: hence he expected assuredly that the promised Messiah would come. Respecting the advent of that Messiah he had had no opportunity of hearing, except from the reports of persons who were adverse to the truth: (and such is yet the unhappy lot of kings and princes, who are constrained for the most part to form their judgment from very partial and erroneous statements:) but now, from the discourse of Paul, he was convinced that Jesus was the Christ, and that his religion was indeed from God.

Still however he knew not how to embrace this religion himself. He saw that an open profession of Christianity might possibly shake his authority amongst all his subjects; and

[a] ver. 3. [b] ver. 27.

and that at all events it must be attended with a life of mortification and self-denial, since he must renounce "the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life," and give himself up to God in a life of universal holiness. But this was too great a sacrifice for him to make. If he could be a Christian, and yet retain the pleasures of sense and the honour that cometh of man, he would willingly embrace the Gospel; but if he must encounter so many difficulties, he will rather forego the pearl, than pay the price.]

This, alas! is the state of many amongst ourselves—

[Many are convinced that the Gospel is true, and that there is "no other name under heaven but that of Christ, whereby we can be saved." They even envy the state of those who follow Christ; and wish, if it might be so, to share their lot in the eternal world. But to expose themselves to shame or loss for professing the Gospel, they dare not: their reputation, and their interests, are too valuable to risk in such a way: to "deny themselves, and take up their cross daily and follow Christ," is a requisition which they know not how to comply with. If they might "serve God and Mammon" too, and have "communion with Christ and Belial" at the same time, they would stand forth as open friends of the Gospel; but if they must "follow Christ without the camp," and "forsake all for him," they cannot prevail upon themselves to encounter such difficulties.

This is particularly found amongst those who are held in much estimation in the world. The more eminent and distinguished any are, the more timidity they manifest. If Agrippa had been only a poor man, he would probably have followed up his convictions, and been *altogether* persuaded to become a Christian: but his high rank and conspicuous station operated as an insurmountable barrier in his way. And so it is at this day: the poor embrace the Gospel freely; but the rich and the great and the learned scarcely dare be seen among the followers of the despised Nazarene: and hence it is, that so few of them are called[c].]

But this state, though common, is indeed most dangerous—

[In one view it may appear *hopeful*; because where the judgment is convinced, there is reason to hope that the heart will soon obey the dictates of the understanding: but when once men begin to "rebel against the light," they grieve in a most peculiar manner the Spirit of God, and provoke him to give them up to judicial blindness. True it is, that the struggle between light and darkness is often of long continuance:

[c] 1 Cor. i. 26.

tinuance: but during all that time the person is in a most pitiable state. *He enjoys none of the benefits of true religion:* he is a stranger to peace with God, because he does not "cleave to Christ with full purpose of heart:" he has no peace in his own conscience, because he is sensible that he is not upright before God: he has no sense of God's love shed abroad in his heart, no delight in communion with him, no glorious prospects beyond the grave. No: a consciousness that he is not wholly given up to God, eats out all comfort, and fills him rather with painful forebodings of the future judgment. *His state is even worse than if he had been altogether destitute of light*[d]. Every hour that he continues to fight against his convictions, greatly augments his guilt[e], and insures a heavier condemnation[f]. The judge of quick and dead hath told us, that the man that knew his Lord's will and did it not, shall be beaten with many stripes."]

If Agrippa's state then was so dangerous, let us inquire,

II. What is that state in which we should all desire to be—

We cannot but admire the address with which the Apostle answered this irresolute king. He had bonds and imprisonments; but of those he did not wish his bitterest enemies to partake: but of his hopes, his victories, his enjoyments, he wished all to have an equal fruition with himself: with the exception of his bonds, he heartily prayed that they might be altogether in a state like his.

Consider what was the state of the apostle Paul—

[How clear, how full, how refreshing to his soul, were his views of Christ! Perhaps no human Being was ever so highly favoured in this respect as he. And what effects did these views produce? They filled his soul with a "peace that passed all understanding," and a "joy that was unspeakable and glorified:" they called forth all his powers, both of body and mind, into the service of his Lord. He accounted all that he possessed, as bought with the precious blood of Christ, and therefore as to be used for him alone. To make him known to others was the one end for which he lived: and whatever difficulties or dangers he had to encounter for the sake of Christ, none of them could move him; yea, rather he gloried in them, and rejoiced that he was counted worthy to contend with them. But who can adequately describe

[d] John xv. 22. [e] Jam. iv. 17. [f] John iii. 19.

scribe his state? Who can tell the fervour of his desires after Christ, the zeal he had to promote his glory, the delight he felt in his service, and the assured prospects which he enjoyed of dwelling with Christ for ever? ———]

Such was the state which Paul desired for all his auditors; and such we should all desire for ourselves—

[We should not be content with any thing short of the attainments that were made by Paul: nay, if we had attained the same as he, we should still "forget what was behind, and reach forward to that which is before, and press toward the mark for the prize of our high calling." We are far from saying, that none are Christians indeed till they have attained his stature: but we must caution all against thinking themselves Christians, whilst there remains any one lust which they will not sacrifice for Christ, or any one duty they will not perform. The man that will not lay down life itself for Christ, cannot be his disciple. Behold then the pattern which we must all resemble: the love, the zeal, the patience, the entire devotedness of heart and life to Christ which were in Paul, must be in us: we must, in desire and endeavour at least, if not in actual attainment, be almost and altogether such as he was.

This must be the pattern for all who are *in the Ministry*, or are *preparing for the Ministry*, to aim at. We should not be like the idle shepherds who neglected their flocks; but like the Great Shepherd himself, who "laid down his life for his sheep:" and though we may be called to a sphere of small and limited extent, yet should we *be in that sphere, as Paul* was in the vast circle which he was called to fill: we should be servants to all for Christ's sake, and labour in season and out of season for every individual committed to our care.

If any, on account of their more exalted station, suppose that these observations are not applicable to them, let them remember who Festus and Agrippa were, and that the prayer in our text was offered up in the first place more immediately for them. The higher any are, the more needful is it for them to imitate all the graces and excellencies of the Apostle Paul.

But without confining it to any rank or order of men, I beg to express the Apostle's wish for "all that hear me this day." This is the state proper for all of every degree; and necessary for them also, if ever they would approve themselves to God———]

ADDRESS.

1. The wavering and undecided—

[Perhaps on account of your pious dispositions it may be said,

said, you are "not far from the kingdom of heaven:" but to what purpose will this be, if you do not advance? It will be no consolation to you that you were once not far from the kingdom, if at last you are not admitted into it. But consider what it is that prevents you from becoming Christians altogether? Be assured, that, whatever it be, it will ultimately ruin your souls. The young man whom Jesus loved for the general amiableness of his character, was left to perish, when he refused to part with all for Christ. The Lord grant, that none of you may continue "almost persuaded," but that you may all with one heart and one mind devote yourselves to him instantly and without reserve.]

2. Those who think themselves altogether persuaded to embrace Christ—

[It is not uncommon to feel a very fervent desire to serve the Lord at one time, and afterwards to relapse into a state of coldness and indifference. Our spiritual enemies often appear dead, when they are only lulled asleep for a season. But oh! Brethren, beware how you leave your first love, or look back after having put your hand to the plough. See the bright example before you: see how, like the sun in its course, he shined brighter and brighter to the perfect day. So do ye also proceed. Never think you have attained any thing, whilst any thing remains to be attained. Be never weary in well doing. Think what an ornament Paul was to his profession, and what a blessing to the world; and strive, that as God was glorified in him, so he may be more and more glorified in you also.]

DCCCXCVIII.

PAUL'S DELIVERANCE FROM SHIPWRECK.

Acts xxvii. 25. *Sirs, be of good cheer: for I believe God, that it shall be even as it was told me.*

WHATEVER difference there may sometimes appear between the dispensations of God's providence and the declarations of his word, we may be well assured that there never was, nor ever shall be, the slightest opposition between them. The declarations of God indeed may be conditional, when the conditions are not actually expressed; and then the event predicted, will be conformed, not to *the words*, but to *the spirit* of the declaration. This was remarkably the case with respect to Nineveh, which was spared, *apparently*

apparently in opposition to the threatenings denounced against them, but *really in conformity with* the conditions contained in them: but no word that was unconditionally uttered, ever failed of its accomplishment.

In the history of St. Paul there were strong and positive assurances given him, that he should preach the Gospel at Rome[a]. But various circumstances arose from time to time, which threatened to defeat this purpose of the Most High. When Paul was seized in the Temple, the people dragged him out with extreme violence, and "went about to kill him[b]:" and when he made his defence before them, they were wrought up almost to madness, and cried out, "Away with such a fellow from the earth; for it is not fit that he should live[c]!" The next day, when he was standing before the Jewish Council, there arose so great a dissention between his auditors, that he was in danger of being "pulled in pieces by them[d]." Then there was a conspiracy of more than forty persons formed to take away his life[e]: and, when this was, almost by miracle, defeated, another conspiracy was formed and defeated in like manner, notwithstanding the Judge himself strove to favour it[f]. At last he was sent by sea to Rome: but behold, he was overtaken with a storm, which seemed to cut off all hope of his ever arriving at his final destination. Even Paul himself appears now to have given up all expectation that his life would be spared: but God sent an angel to dissipate his fears, and to assure him, that what had been spoken to him respecting his standing before Cesar, should certainly be accomplished[g]. This declaration the Apostle fully credited; and he took occasion from it to comfort and encourage all that were in the ship with him; "Sirs, be of good cheer; for I believe God, that it shall be even as it was told me."

From these words, as verified in the event, we shall take occasion to set before you,

I. The

[a] Ch. xix. 21. & xxiii. 11. [b] Ch. xxi. 31. [c] Ch. xxii. 22.
[d] Ch. xxiii. 10. [e] ib. ver. 14, 15.
[f] Ch. xxv. 2, 3, 9, 10, 11. [g] ver. 24.

I. The office of faith—

[Faith is represented by St. Paul as "the substance of things hoped for, and the evidence of things not seen:" and such it manifested itself to be in Paul at this time: he saw not how his deliverance was to be effected; but God had told him that the whole crew should be saved; and therefore he entertained no doubt whatever as to the issue of their present dangers.

Now this is exactly the office of faith in relation to every word of God. Whether God threaten or promise, we must regard the event as certain. Much is told us in the Inspired Volume respecting the salvation of all who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ———These promises we are to apprehend and rely upon, "not staggering at any of them," but having a confident assurance that they shall all be fulfilled to us in their season———]

We must not however separate from this,

II. The obligations of faith—

[When the peril of shipwreck became more imminent, the sailors, under pretence of casting anchors out of the fore-ship, would have endeavoured to save themselves in the boat: but Paul, perceiving their intentions, told the Centurion and the soldiers, that unless the seamen continued in the ship, none of the crew could be saved[h]. But had not God promised absolutely, that not one life among them should be lost? How then could the desertion of a part of the crew prove the destruction of the whole? The answer to this is plain: God had ordained *the means* as well as *the end:* and to seek the one without using the other, was to *tempt* God, rather than to *trust* him.

Now this observation is of great importance, as reflecting light on the manner in which God accomplishes all his promises to us. He "has given us exceeding great and precious promises;" and no one of them shall ever fail: but we are not therefore at liberty to sit down idly, and to expect salvation without any exertions on our part: we must exert ourselves, as much as if our success depended wholly on our own arm; and at the same time we are to trust in God as simply, as if no effort whatever were used by us. This is the mode prescribed by God himself. He tells us, that "eternal life is the gift of God through Jesus Christ:" yet he says, "*Labour for* the meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of man will *give* you[i]." The consideration of God's promised aid is so far from superseding our own personal exertions, that it is our great encouragement to put them forth[k]: and to look for

[h] ver. 31.

[i] John vi. 27. Compare with this, other passages of like import: Ezek. xxxvi. 36, 37. Prov. ii. 2—6. [k] Phil. ii. 12, 13.

for salvation in any other way than that which God has marked out, is to deceive ourselves to our eternal ruin. The means and the end are equally ordained of God[l]; and what God has joined, it is in vain for man to put asunder.]

In performing these duties, we may expect,

III. The benefits of faith—

[Two benefits accrued to Paul and his associates, namely, *present peace*, and *final safety*. Notwithstanding the storm continued as violent as ever, and they had turned adrift the boat which they might have looked to as useful for their preservation, we behold the whole crew in a state of comparative peace and comfort[m]: and, in the issue, every one of them obtained the desire of his soul; for though the ship grounded, and was broken in pieces, all were saved at last; some by swimming to shore, and others on boards and the broken pieces of the ship.

Here we behold an exact representation of the benefits which faith in Christ will always obtain. We shall be brought to a state of sweet composure, notwithstanding we are yet in the midst of a tumultuous world, and menaced with dangers on every side: we shall "be filled with joy and peace in believing[n]," yea "with joy unspeakable and glorified[o]"——Our anticipation of a successful issue to our conflicts will be almost, as it were, an antepast of heaven[p]. Nor shall we be disappointed of our hope at last[q]. Our way may be "through much tribulation;" yea, we may "be scarcely saved[r]," that is, with vast difficulty; we may "be saved so as by fire[s]:" but we shall never perish: "it is not the will of our Father that one of his little ones should perish[t];" nor shall one grain, however sifted, or however small, be missing from his garner[u].]

ADDRESS,

1. Those who are proceeding on their voyage without any apprehension of danger—

[The mariners, though warned by Paul, thought little of danger till it was too late. And have not we innumerable warnings from all the Inspired Writers? yet we go forward thinking of little but temporal ease and prosperity. But how soon may the hour arrive, when, like the mariners, we shall be glad to part with all that we possess, for the preservation even of our bodily lives, and much more for the salvation of our souls! Let us in a time of ease and prosperity consider this, and stand prepared for troubles and for death itself. That

[l] 2 Thess. ii. 13. [m] ver. 36. [n] Rom. xv. 13. [o] 1 Pet. i. 8.
[p] Rom. viii. 33—39. [q] Isai. xlv. 17. [r] 1 Pet. iv. 18. [s] 1 Cor. iii. 15.
[t] Matt. xviii. 14. [u] Am. ix. 9.

That servant alone is truly "blessed, whom his Lord, when he cometh, shall find thus watching."]

2. Those who are harassed with storms and tempests—

[Many there are, who, in this ever-changing state of things, are "afflicted and tossed with tempest, and not comforted." But, blessed be God, they have "an anchor of the soul, both sure and stedfast." "The promises made to us in Christ, are sure to all the seed." However imminent our danger may appear, we should not despond: "there is help laid for us on One that is mighty," on One, who is "able to save to the uttermost all that come unto God by him." Fear not then, but only believe; and whatever difficulties you may have to encounter, you have the promise of your Lord and Saviour, that "none shall pluck you out of his hand;" and his Father's veracity and power, no less than his own, are pledged for your everlasting salvation[x].]

[x] John x. 28, 29.

DCCCXCIX.

PAUL BITTEN BY A VIPER, AND UNINJURED.

Acts xxviii. 3—6. *And when Paul had gathered a bundle of sticks, and laid them on the fire, there came a viper out of the heat, and fastened on his hand. And when the barbarians saw the venomous beast hang on his hand, they said among themselves, No doubt this man is a murderer, whom, though he hath escaped the sea, yet vengeance suffereth not to live. And he shook off the beast into the fire, and felt no harm. Howbeit they looked when he should have swollen, or fallen down suddenly: but, after they had looked a great while, and saw no harm come to him, they changed their minds, and said that he was a god.*

IT is curious to observe how, in this chequered scene of life, judgments and mercies, trials and deliverances, crosses and comforts, are intermixed. In the space of a few hours Paul was shipwrecked, and saved; destitute, and relieved; bitten by a viper, and preserved from injury; judged as a murderer, and honoured as a god.

These events, though not of primary importance, are yet deserving of consideration.

The

The inhabitants of Malta, here called "Barbarians," as not being learned and polished like the Greeks and Romans, shewed great kindness and hospitality to the shipwrecked crew: and in this they put to shame many who bear the Christian name, who would have plundered, rather than relieved, the unhappy sufferers. A fire being made to warm the people and to dry their clothes, St. Paul gladly exerted himself for the general good, and, gathering a bundle of sticks, put them on the fire. But a viper that had lain concealed in the fagot, no sooner felt the heat, than he seized the hand of Paul, and held it fast with his teeth. Paul however, betraying no fear, held up his hand for a time with great composure, and then shook off the venomous creature into the fire. This event gave rise to various conjectures, which now we proceed to notice.

Let us see,

1. In what light it was viewed by the people present—

At first they regarded it as a judgment on him for some heinous crime—

[There is even in the minds of Heathens some idea of a superintending Providence, who, though in general inattentive to the concerns of men, interposes sometimes on great occasions, especially to detect and punish the crime of murder. The first thought therefore of the spectators was, that Paul was thus singled out as a monument of Divine vengeance, which, though it had spared him in the shipwreck, would not suffer his iniquity to pass unpunished.

Now this sentiment is to a certain degree just: but it is erroneous when carried to too great an extent. Certain it is that God does on some occasions mark, as it were, in a visible manner his indignation against sin: but in numberless instances even the most aggravated transgressions pass unpunished in this life, and are reserved for adequate retribution to the judgment of the great day. It is certain also that temporal calamities are by no means to be regarded as certain marks of God's displeasure: for they are often sent as fruits of his paternal love[a]. The great error of Job's friends was, that they judged him as a hypocrite, because of the heavy calamities that came upon him: and our blessed Lord has especially

[a] Heb. xii. 6.

especially guarded us against forming such uncharitable conclusions, in relation to those whose blood Pilate mingled with the sacrifices, or those on whom the tower of Siloam fell[b]. The truth is, that in this world "all things come alike to all;" "nor can any man know either love or hatred by all that is before him[c]." Josiah, as well as Saul or Ahab, may be slain in battle; and Paul, as well as the rebellious Israelites, may be bitten by a serpent: and therefore to condemn any on account of the afflictions with which they are visited, is to act like those who accounted David, yea, and Christ himself, as judicially stricken and smitten of their God[d].]

Afterwards, they considered it as an evidence that he was a god—

[As the Heathen imagined that there was a superior Being who punished sin, so they believed that their gods sometimes "came down to them in the likeness of men[e]." Hence, when the people saw that Paul had sustained no injury, they concluded that he must be a god. But here they ran to an opposite extreme. Having no knowledge of the only true God, and of his power to protect his servants, they missed entirely the true construction, which they should have put upon the event before them. But indeed, there is this propensity in every man to judge too favourably of those who prosper, as well as too unfavourably of those who suffer. The just medium can be attained by those only, who investigate matters with a dispassionate mind, and take every thing into consideration that should regulate and decide the judgment.]

From shewing in what light *they* viewed the event, we proceed to consider,

II. In what light it should be viewed—

God had doubtless some gracious design in this dispensation. We apprehend it was intended by him,

1. As a means whereby to awaken their attention to his Gospel—

[Paul was sent to Rome that he might testify of Christ in Cesar's palace. And as he was now in his way thither, God ordained that he should have an opportunity of making known the Saviour to the Barbarians at Malta. But Paul was now a prisoner, and therefore not likely to gain much attention from the people: besides that, he was not at liberty to

[b] Luke xiii. 1—5. [c] Eccl. ix. 1—3. [d] Ps. xli. 8. Isai. liii. 4.
[e] Ch. xiv. 11.

to go amongst them as he would willingly have done. But, by this miracle, the attention of all was instantly fixed on him, and a way was opened for a free communication of the Gospel of Christ. That he availed himself of the opportunity, we cannot doubt: and that he had considerable success, there is reason to conclude, from the gratitude expressed by all ranks of people amongst them at his departure.

The same object, we apprehend, God has in view, by numberless dispensations which occur from time to time. Both mercies and judgments are continually represented as designed of God for his end; "And they shall know that I am the Lord." The miraculous powers with which the Apostles were invested were not *credentials only*, for the authenticating of their divine mission, but *means also* of recommending the Gospel to the attention and acceptance of men. And we shall do well to regard the various events that are now passing in the world, as calls from God to embrace and hold fast the Gospel of Christ.]

2. As a standing memorial of the care which God takes of all his faithful servants—

[Many and glorious are the promises which God gives us of security in his service. That we are not to expect visible and miraculous interpositions in our favour, is true: but we are not to suppose that he will leave us to the influence of blind chance, or give us up into the hand of our inveterate enemies. Were his gracious care withdrawn, "Satan would soon sift every one of us as wheat." But Jehovah keeps us in his everlasting arms, so that "no weapon that is formed against us can prosper." As our Lord could not be apprehended till his time was come, so neither can any of his faithful people be destroyed, till God himself has signed the warrant. See how amply this is set forth by David[f], and in the book of Job[g]: and shall these promises fail of their accomplishment? "Hath God said, and will he not do it; hath he spoken, and will he not make it good?" The promises made directly to the Apostles, must, as to their literal sense, be limited to them[h]: but, in the spirit of them, they must be applied to all, who put themselves under the shadow of Jehovah's wing[i]. "The wrath of man shall praise him:" and every occurrence, however adverse to the eye of sense, shall work for the present and eternal good of all his faithful people[k].]

Let us LEARN then from hence,

1. Justice

[f] Ps. xci. 9—13.
[g] Job v. 19—23.
[h] Mark xvi. 17, 18. Luke x. 19.
[i] Ps. xci. 3—7.
[k] Rom. viii. 28. 2 Cor. iv. 17.

1. Justice to man—

[We all are prone to judge one another: but this is to usurp the prerogative of Jehovah. The command of Christ, and of his Apostles is, "Judge not;" "Judge nothing before the time, &c.[l]".]

2. Confidence in God—

[It may be, that in the service of our God our trials may be great and numerous; yea, and we may be judged by our fellow-creatures with the severest judgment: but we may safely commit every event to him[m], assured, that he will "bring forth our righteousness as the noon-day," if not in this world, yet most certainly in the world to come.]

[l] Matt. vii. 1, 2. 1 Cor. iv. 5. [m] ib. ver. 3.

DCCCC.

THE FOLLOWERS OF CHRIST EVIL SPOKEN OF.

Acts xxviii. 22. *We desire to hear what thou thinkest: for as concerning this sect, we know that everywhere it is evil spoken of.*

AS prejudice is easily excited in the mind, so is its operation extremely powerful, wherever it is entertained. An opprobrious term will often convey more in one moment, than could be conveyed otherwise in many sentences: and, as superseding the necessity of any specific accusations, it is generally resorted to as the means of bringing either persons or things into general contempt. The enemies of Christianity in every age have availed themselves of this advantage, to decry a religion which they did not choose to embrace. Thus, when St. Paul came to Rome, and had convened the principal Jews to his lodgings, he found, that, though no accusations had been brought against *him*, his religion, and all who professed it, were regarded in an odious light, through the malignant misrepresentations of their adversaries. Let us then inquire,

I. Whence it was that the Gospel was so universally evil spoken of in the Apostolic age—

That the Gospel was universally reviled, is obvious from

from the decided manner in which the notoriety of the fact is mentioned in the text; "We know it:" and it was so chiefly on two grounds;

1. As being impious in itself—

[*The Jews* regarded it as subversive of the law of Moses. They could not see that Jesus was the person to whom Moses and the Prophets had borne witness: they could not see that he had actually fulfilled the law, and was himself the substance, of which that was only the shadow: they therefore conceived his pretensions to be in direct opposition to God's revealed will; and his religion to be a system of impiety altogether———*The Gentiles* also, finding that Christianity required an utter dereliction of all their false gods, and at the same time presented to them no visible object of worship, accounted all its professors Atheists. They knew indeed that Christians worshipped Him who died for them on Mount Calvary: but that seemed only to add folly to impiety; since to regard him as a *God* and a *Saviour*, who, to all appearance, was not even able to save himself, was an act of absurdity, in their eyes, bordering on madness———]

2. As injurious to mankind—

[To *individuals* it was supposed to be a source of distraction to the mind, and of immorality in the life. Even the Head of this religion, the despised Nazarene, was thought to be "beside himself;" nor were his followers in any better plight; since they professed to turn their backs upon all visible good, and to follow a good that was invisible. Moreover, in the midst of these high pretensions, they were supposed to be addicted to all manner of licentious habits, even such as the Gentiles themselves scarcely ventured to indulge [a].

To *families*, this religion was considered as a source of incalculable mischief; since, wherever it came, it set the nearest relatives against each other, as even the Founder of it himself had declared it would [b].

It was hostile also *to* the welfare of *the State*. It inculcated many things which the Roman laws forbad, and prohibited many things which they enjoined. It set up a king above Cesar himself [c]. Was such a religion as this to be tolerated? No: every sensible Governor would give the same direction respecting it, as Haman gave in relation to the Jews; that it ought to be banished from the face of the earth [d].]

But, now that Christianity is established, does the same

[a] 1 Pet. ii. 12. & iii. 16.
[b] Matt. x. 34—36.
[c] Ch. xvi. 20, 21. & xvii. 6, 7. & xxiv. 5, 6.
[d] Esth. iii. 8. 9.

same prejudice against it remain? Let us inquire into this matter, and see,

II. How far it meets with similar treatment at this day—

The name of Christianity is still odious among millions of the human race: and, even among those who call themselves Christians, the true Gospel is disapproved and detested by multitudes, who are ready to number themselves among its warmest advocates. It is hated on many accounts;

1. As too humiliating in its representations—

[It represents the whole human race as in a state of guilt and condemnation, and as utterly incapable of delivering themselves by any thing that they can do. It presents to their view a Saviour, in and through whom all their wants must be supplied, and to whom they must stand indebted for their whole salvation, from first to last[e]. But men cannot endure to think themselves so guilty, so polluted, so enslaved, so utterly helpless and hopeless, as the Scripture represents them to be; and this will be found to be at the root of all their objections against the Gospel: examine all the writings of those who oppose the truth, and this will appear to be the leading feature of them, that they suppose some degree of goodness and sufficiency to remain in fallen man; whilst the Gospel declares, that we are "altogether become abominable[f]," and that even the will, as well as the power, to do good must be given us from the Lord[g].]

2. As too easy in its proposals—

[It offers salvation freely to every human Being, saying, "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved[h]". It requires nothing on our parts to *earn* salvation, nothing to *merit* it; but only to receive it thankfully as the free gift of God to us in Christ Jesus[i]. But the proud heart of man does not like to be so indebted to the free grace of God: that invitation, "Come, ye that have no money, come buy wine and milk without money and without price," is offensive to him: he would rather hear of some duties to perform that shall render him worthy of God's favour, and of some good works to be done, in order to form a ground of glorying before God: and, if works be declared to be utterly ineffectual to these ends, he immediately supposes them to be unneces-

[e] 1 Cor. i. 30.
[f] Rom. iii. 10—19.
[g] Phil. ii. 13.
[h] Mark xvi. 16. Acts xvi. 30, 31.
[i] Rom. vi. 23.

unnecessary altogether, and that we leave men at liberty to indulge in all manner of licentiousness.]

3. As too strict in its requirements—

[We stop not now to notice the inconsistency between the former objection and this: suffice it to say, that they are made by the same persons, and oftentimes almost in the same breath. The Gospel requires, that we mortify all sin whatever; that we "crucify the flesh, with its affections and lusts;" and that we "live altogether not to ourselves, but unto Him that died for us, and rose again." But this is supposed to be incompatible with all the common offices of life: and we are represented as making the way to heaven so strait, that none but a few devotees can hope to enter into it.

Thus the truth of God is in reality traduced, as in the days of old, and, though the name of Christianity is honoured, the life and power of it are despised.]

Since then the Gospel is still evil spoken of to such a degree, permit me to state—

III. What is our duty in relation to it—

We should endeavour to get all possible information respecting it,

[It would be strange indeed to form our judgment solely from the representations of its enemies: we ought assuredly to hear its friends also, and to learn what they have to say in its favour. If then we can have access to any who are qualified to instruct us, we should say to them, as the Jews did to Paul, "We desire to hear what thou thinkest." Were this step taken, and with any measure of candour, I have no doubt but that the prejudices against the Gospel would soon be done away. But there is one, to whom we may all have access, and whose judgment may be fully relied on; I mean, that very person to whom the Jews at Rome applied, even the apostle Paul himself. No man had ever juster or deeper views of the Gospel than he; and no man has written so fully respecting it as he: consult him therefore: study those Epistles of his in which the subject is most fully stated, the Epistles to the Romans, the Galatians, and the Ephesians. From those may be fully learned the doctrines which the Gospel maintains: and in his life may be seen the practice it requires. Go then, and sit at his feet, and ask of him in relation to every thing we have spoken, "What thinkest *thou?*"]

Our inquiries, however, should not be merely speculative, but practical—

[We should not, like Pilate, ask, "What is truth?" and then

then go away without any desire to be informed: but should imitate rather the man whose blindness had been healed, "Who is the Son of God, that I may believe on him[k]?" All our inquiries should be with a view to practise, and with a determination of heart to follow the light whithersoever it may lead us. Did we, like the Bereans, search the Scriptures daily with this view, it would soon be said of us, as it was of them, "Therefore many of them believed[l]."]

We will now, by way of IMPROVEMENT,

1. Give a specific answer to the question ourselves—

Is it asked by any, "What thinkest thou" of the Gospel itself, and of the people who profess it? We reply, that, in our judgment, the plain simple doctrine of salvation by faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, is, "the wisdom of God, and the power of God," even "the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth;" and that its proper title is, "the glorious Gospel of the blessed God." As for those who profess it, we say, that, if they walk unworthy of it, they are hypocrites, and self-deceivers: but, if they adorn it by a suitable life and conversation, then are they "the excellent of the earth," "the Church of the living God," "the sons and daughters of the Lord Almighty." Of them will we say, with Moses, "Happy art thou, O Israel; who is like unto thee, O people saved of the Lord[m]?" Whoever may speak against them, they may be of good courage; for God approves them, and will confess them as his before the assembled universe. They shall assuredly "be his, in the day, that he shall make up his jewels[n]."]

2. Put the question to every one here present—

[What thinkest THOU? *Dost thou think the doctrines of the Gospel so objectionable as the world represents them to be?* Compare those doctrines with thine own wants and necessities; and then say, Whether they do not contain the very remedy which thou standest in need of? ——— Would Paul have represented them as containing "the unsearchable riches of Christ;" and would the angels be represented as ever "desiring to look into them," if they were unworthy of our regard?

Again, *Dost thou think that those who embrace the Gospel deserve the ignominious appellation of "a sect?"* By this name they were called in the first ages; and by this name they are yet too often called. But, because "they worship God in a way which *the world calls* heresy," are they therefore heretics?" No:

[k] John ix. 36. [l] Acts xvii. 11, 12.
[m] Deut. xxxiii. 29. [n] Mal. iii. 17.

No: they are "the general assembly and Church of the First-born, which are written in heaven;" they are the living stones of which his Temple is composed; and they are now, and shall to all eternity continue, the habitation of God through the Spirit[o].

Once more; *Dost thou think, that, because "they are every-where evil spoken of," thou shouldest not join thyself to them?* Sad indeed is thy state, if thou entertainest such a thought as that: for, "if thou art ashamed of Christ, of thee will Christ be ashamed," when he shall come in his glory to judge the world. Remember the choice of Moses, and ask, Whether it be not that which thou shouldest make[p]? If the circumstance of the Lord's people being universally "evil spoken of" appear an argument *against* them, know, that it is greatly *in their favour;* and that, if you belong to a party that is *not* universally evil spoken of by the ungodly world, you are not of the party to which Paul belonged, nor shall have your portion with him in the eternal world.

What though they be "a little flock?" they are those to whom "it is the Father's good pleasure to give the kingdom[q]." What if they be walking in "a strait and narrow unfrequented path?" it is "the path that leadeth unto life," whilst all other paths, however frequented, "lead only to destruction[r]." The time is shortly coming, when they who now most loudly condemn them, will yet still more loudly condemn themselves; "We fools counted their life madness, and their end to be without honour: but now they are numbered with the saints, &c.[s]"

To all then I say, Beware what sentiments you imbibe respecting the Gospel of Christ; and beg of God that you may so think of it in this world, as you will assuredly think of it in the world to come.]

[o] Heb. xii. 23. 1 Pet. ii. 5. Eph. ii. 19—22. [p] Heb. xi. 24—26.
[q] Luke xii. 32. [r] Matt. vii. 13, 14. [s] Wisd. v. 4.

DCCCCI.

THE GOSPEL SENT TO THE GENTILES.

Acts xxviii. 28. *Be it known therefore unto you, that the salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles, and that they will hear it.*

WHEN we consider how often we are called together to hear the word of God, we are surprised and humbled to find so little good done by it. But the Apostles themselves had the same cause for complaint

plaint as we. We can scarcely conceive a more solemn occasion than that on which the Jews at Rome were convened to hear the Gospel. St. Paul was brought thither as a prisoner, on account of his zeal and fidelity in the cause of Christ. The Jews were anxious to know from himself what were the peculiar doctrines which he maintained: and, having appointed a day for that purpose, they came to his lodging, and attended to his discourse from morning to evening. But, alas! the greater part of them rejected his testimony, and drew from him that solemn admonition, which had, many hundred years before, been given to their fathers: he told them that they were given up to judicial blindness; and that the consolation which he in vain sought amongst them, he should find amongst the Gentiles; who were ordained of God to inherit those blessings which they despised.

There are two things which we propose to notice on the present occasion:

I. The salvation here spoken of—

It is of great importance to observe the terms by which the Gospel is here designated: it is called "the salvation of God."

It is "salvation"—

[The true nature of the Gospel is by no means generally understood. The generality conceive it to be nothing more than a new system of duties. There are some, however, who appear to be acquainted with its nature to a certain extent, but materially fail when they come to explain themselves more fully. They will speak of our condemnation by the law, and our inability to save ourselves according to the terms of the first covenant: they will also represent Christ as introducing a new covenant, and as the Author of salvation to all who believe in him. Thus far they are right: but when it is inquired what are the terms of the new covenant, and how it is that Christ saves his people, they shew that "they have need to be taught afresh what be the first principles of the Oracles of God." They say that Christ has procured for us a milder law, which requires only sincere obedience: and that, if we endeavour to obey that law, his death shall atone for our imperfections, and his righteousness shall make up for our defects. But this representation of Christ's work very ill accords with the

the terms by which the Gospel is characterized in the text. The Gospel in that view would be only a new law; and salvation by it would be, in fact, salvation by works, and not by grace. However the law itself be reduced, if our obedience to it, either in whole or in part, be the ground of our acceptance with God, it is salvation by works; and the performers of those works will have to glory before God. Let our justification depend ever so little on our works, the case will be precisely the same: we shall have *some* ground of boasting within ourselves: if not *so much* as we should have had by the first covenant, still we have *some:* which clearly proves, that this idea of the Gospel is erroneous: for the Gospel excludes boasting altogether [a].

The truth is, that the Gospel is a revelation of "salvation," of salvation wrought out for us by the Son of God; wrought out, I say, entirely by his obedience unto death. It views men as lost, entirely lost and undone in themselves. It represents Christ as assuming our nature, to obey that law which we had broken, and endure those penalties which we had incurred: and it declares, that all who will come to Christ, relying wholly on his blood and righteousness, shall be accepted through him. It is true, it requires works as evidences of our faith; but the only ground which it proposes for our justification before God, is the all-sufficient righteousness of Jesus Christ. In a word, it reveals and offers to us a salvation purchased by the blood of Christ, and freely given to all who believe in him.]

It is emphatically called "the salvation of God"—

[This salvation was altogether *planned by God.* No created Being could have devised such a scheme for saving man in perfect consistency with all the Divine perfections ——— It was *executed by God,* who miraculously formed the human nature of Christ in the womb of a virgin, and upheld him in every part of his most arduous undertaking, and raised him from the dead, and constituted him Head over all things to the Church, that he might finish the work he had begun, and secure to himself the souls which he has purchased with his blood ——— Finally, it was in every respect *worthy of God;* such a display of wisdom, of goodness, and of all his glorious perfections, as will be the one object of wonder, love, and praise, to all eternity ———

As for the system which men have substituted in its place, it is indeed "another Gospel," which the Apostles never knew, and which God never revealed. It deserves not to be called "the salvation of God;" for it is no salvation at all: nor

[a] Rom. iii. 27.

nor would any creature be ever saved by it. Who will undertake to tell us what that quantum of imperfection is which it allows of; or to define the exact limits of that sincerity which it requires? It is the offspring of pride and ignorance; and will be the parent of everlasting misery, to all who embrace it. That only is the true Gospel, which leaves to man no ground of glorying in himself, but gives all the glory of his salvation to God alone.]

Let us next turn our attention to,

II. The things affirmed respecting it—

We cannot but observe the solemnity with which the Apostle's affirmations are introduced. But there was occasion for it, because the things which he asserted appeared altogether incredible. He asserted,

1. That the Gospel salvation was sent to the Gentiles—

[Of this the Jews had no conception. Being habituated to consider themselves as exclusively the Lord's people, and to regard the Gentiles as dogs, they could not even listen to the idea that the wall of partition should ever be broken down, and the Gentiles be incorporated with the Church of God[b]. And the Apostles themselves were exceeding slow to admit the thought, notwithstanding they had been commanded to "go into all the world, and to preach the Gospel to every creature." Even six years after our Lord's ascension, Peter himself could not be prevailed upon to go and instruct a heathen family, without repeated visions to convince him that it was agreeable to the mind of God: and, when he had done it, he was called to an account for it by the whole College of Apostles, who were pacified only by the relation which he gave of the different visions, and the testimony which God himself bore to his conduct by pouring out upon them the gift of the Holy Ghost. When convinced by his arguments, they exclaimed with surprise, "Then hath God unto the Gentiles granted repentance unto life[c]. But the Apostle here declares that God had sent salvation to the Gentiles, and that it should be sent to them throughout all the world. To this he adds,]

2. That they would hear it—

[The Jews, notwithstanding they had enjoyed the ministry of Christ, and beheld his miracles, and had his resurrection so abundantly attested; notwithstanding an appeal also was constantly made to their own Inspired Writings, and the accomplishment

[b] Acts xxii. 21, 22. [c] Acts xi. 18.

complishment of acknowledged prophecies was pointed out to them,—notwithstanding every advantage, I say, they would not believe. The probability therefore was, that, if they, with all their means of information, rejected the Gospel, much more would the Heathen reject it. But God foresaw that they would receive it, or rather, fore-ordained that they should. Accordingly, we find that millions in every quarter of the globe have been made obedient to the faith; and we are assured that all "the fulness of the Gentiles shall in due time come in[d]"———To God nothing is impossible; and he who has thus far accomplished his word, will certainly fulfil it to the end. The grain of mustard-seed shall become a great tree, and all the birds of heaven come and dwell under its shadow:]

In this subject will be found abundant matter,

1. For reproof—

[It is in this view principally that the words were uttered. And if St. Paul had so much reason to complain when he saw the Jews were not persuaded to embrace Christianity by one sermon, what reason have we to complain, when persons professing Christianity cannot be prevailed upon by hundreds of sermons to walk in any measure worthy of their profession! Surely thousands of the poor Heathen,—Indians, Hottentots, Hindoos,—who have received the word with gladness, and experienced the blessedness of this salvation, will rise up in judgment against us, and condemn us. Yes, amongst *them* there are many who value this salvation more than life itself. Ah! how will they reprove our supineness and indifference! Well;—be it known unto you, that if you, who call yourselves Christians, will not value the Gospel as you ought, it shall be taken away from you, and be given to others who will bring forth the fruits thereof with gladness———]

2. For encouragement—

[When exertions are recommended for the conversion of the Heathen, it is common to say, They will not renounce their superstitions; and we cannot attain their language so as to

[d] The prophet Ezekiel, in a vision of a river proceeding from the Sanctuary, and becoming gradually so deep that it could not be forded, represents the progress of the Gospel. The river running into the Dead Sea, where, it is said, no fish can live, instantly healed the sea, so that living fish of every kind became innumerable. The Dead Sea fitly marked the state of the Heathen world; and the effect produced upon it by the waters of the Sanctuary, marked the change which the Gospel should infallibly produce. Ezek. xlvii. 9.

to hope for any success in our endeavours. But if God has sent the Gospel to the Heathen, and declared that they will hear it, we may well look to him to overcome all the difficulties that lie in our way — — — But it may be said, The time is not come. What right have we to say this? or what reason to imagine it? If we consider the exertions that are making in the Christian world for the translating of the Scriptures into different languages, and for sending the Gospel to the remotest corners of the earth, we have reason rather to hope that the time is come. But the time as it respects us is always come; and there is no period when we ought not to exert ourselves in the cause of God, and for the benefit of our fellow-creatures. The question then is, If God has sent salvation to the Heathen, who is willing to carry it? for "they cannot believe, unless they hear; nor can they hear without a preacher." O that there were amongst us more, whose hearts the Lord had "touched with a live coal from off his altar," that when he says, "Who will go for us? would immediately reply, Here am I, send me!" This was the Prophet's frame of mind even when God told him that his ministrations would have no other effect than that of hardening the minds of men[a]. It was sufficient for him that he was doing the Lord's work. How much more then should we be ready to carry the Gospel to the Heathen, when God pledges himself to us that they will hear it! Let us pray to God, that since the harvest is so great, he would send forth labourers; and, if we cannot do all we would, let us, each in his station, do all we can — — —]

[a] Isai. vi. 6—10.

END OF VOL. VIII.

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